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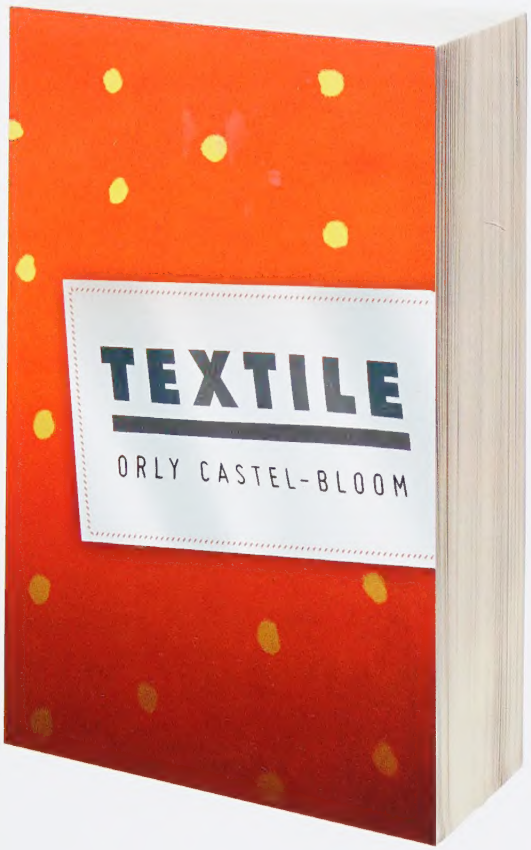

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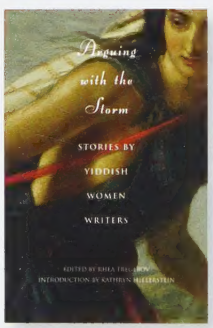

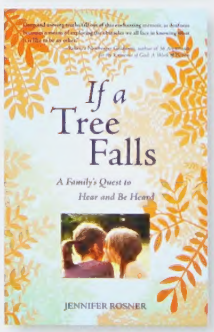

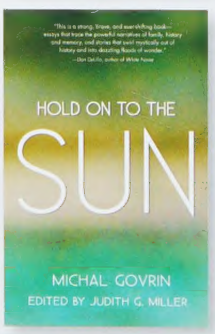

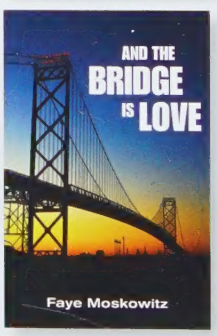

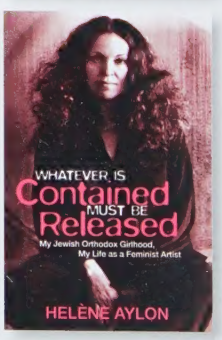

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Lilith

vol. 38, no. 2 • spring 2013

*In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth."**

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"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."

—Nessa Rapoport

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Lilith

Editor in Chief
Susan Weidman Schneider
susanws@lilith.org

Managing Editor
Naomi Danis *naomi@lilith.org*

Senior Editor
Susan Schnur *susanschnur@lilith.org*

Associate Editor
Sonia Isard *sonia@lilith.org*

Fiction Editor
Yona Zeldis McDonough

Poetry Editor
Marge Piercy

Book Reviews
Ilana Kurshan *ilana@lilith.org*

Art Director
Lindsay Barnett *lindsay@lilith.org*

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Lilith
250 West 57th Street, #2432
New York, NY 10107
phone: 212-757-0818 fax: 212-757-5705
info@Lilith.org www.Lilith.org

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Young women are being pressed to "lean in." Sheryl Sandberg—of the book *Lean In*, the Lean In Institute, and the Facebook leadership team, etc.—wants to cheer them on. But leaning in, in fact, is already happening on campus, in at least one surprising context—religious leadership.

I recently attended traditional-egalitarian ("trad-egal" in Jewspeak shorthand) Shabbat services at Brandeis University. It's the style of many Conservative congregations, Jewish summer camps, schools and other prayer-training venues. Liturgy mostly in Hebrew, services led—and participated in—by women and men equally.

Friday afternoon and evening services were led almost entirely by women; about 35 women and five men attended. (Same ratio in other liberal services on campus, and in the leadership of Jewish campus organizations.) The traditional liturgy was sung soprano, and the leaders and *daveners* moved through the structure of the service with ease, including a brief and illuminating *dvar Torah* from a female student. A whole cohort of women is now completely comfortable both in their mastery of Jewish tradition and in their ability to perform it! (Judaism is a very performance-oriented religion: Hebrew and English, sitting and standing, bending and chanting, singing and responding, often without a lot of clues in the prayerbook.)

Sitting in Shabbat services, surrounded mostly by women, I flashed back to a conversation I had with a Catholic journalist who interviewed me when Lilith was launching, decades back. Then, women had just begun to be counted in a minyan in the Conservative movement, at the time the largest movement among American Jews. "Aren't you worried," he asked me, "that soon Judaism will face the same dilemma as the Catholic Church—where the women fill all the pews?" Never! I explained patiently, because of the longstanding patriarchal nature of Jewish law, prayer, and *mitzvot*. I told him, "What we're looking for as women is equal access with men to Jewish practice and Jewish experiences. Plus equal value for women's experiences—we want liturgies for childbirth, naming a baby daughter, ways of honoring women beyond the 'Woman of Valor' psalm." But while the liturgy has stretched—undramatically—to incorporate the naming of foremothers along with forefathers, the major difference is that the leadership has changed, and indeed the makeup of the congregation, too.

The young women I see in action in Jewish settings on campus are comfortable taking leadership roles in ways that feel different from what was described by a Princeton University study a couple of years ago, when researchers noted that women shied away from running in campus elections, and discouraged one another from competing for leadership opportunities.

I asked students what they think drives the high ratio of females to males in Jewish campus leadership now. Among their thoughtful explanations:

Jewish campus life parallels nationwide campus demographics. College enrollment across the U.S. is about 60% female, so women are more visible in leadership roles simply because they outnumber men.

Females are more affiliative, more social. So attending services becomes a very reliable way to be with friends. "You go and everyone is so happy to reach out. Shabbat shalom, great to see you, can you help pass out the prayer books." The guys either need this less or find other ways to bond.

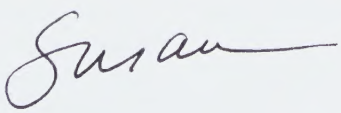
Things self-perpetuate. Like follows like. "When a guy who's a first-year student sees all the Hillel board members are female, he may not feel so comfortable, like this is not the environment for him."

Orthodox women become campus *organization* leaders because they are closed out of many ritual roles in Orthodox services. "We take on those 'enabler' roles because this gives us a way to participate that doesn't violate the gender norms we grew up with."

The power of religious leadership is heady because it is new, heady because there's support for it in the larger community, heady because it is largely not viewed as threatening—the guys aren't seeking these roles Women step into this power vacuum.. And lean in.

How to hang onto the real power females wield on campus now?

So… how to hang onto the real power females wield on campus and channel it *after* college? They'll hold onto their skills. But will their attitudes stay with them—that sense of their own "sleek competence," as one man put it, mixed with humility and a big-tent approach, bringing their full selves into the enterprise—making challah and making Kiddush, all the while expressing their ideas and speculations fearlessly? The college women I sat with in services and at Shabbat dinner and in spirited debate did all this. Here's hoping they can stay confident and brave, doing good work not only behind the scenes but also in the public eye after graduation, and that they'll remember how good it felt to stand at the lectern leading others, whether in services, in Torah study, or in setting the agenda for their campus communities, role models for both their peers and their elders.



Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: DAVID GREENSPUN

The Sages do not like people who do things out of habit.
PARENTS OF GAYS UNITE IN SUPPORT OF OUR CHILDREN!
You think Judaism is a fashionable skirt?
One man's trivialities are another woman's civil rights.
What about my lipstick?

VOICES

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

From the Lilith blog

Rabbis in Red Lipstick

There are many things that play an important part in my morning ritual—a nice hot drink, a shower, morning prayers. One of the most important elements of my morning routine, however, is putting on my red lipstick. There is something so satisfying about applying the final smear of the creamy red across my lips before I walk out of the door—I feel instantly like a brighter, better version of myself. My red lips have been my trademark for the last several years, and though the shade has varied, it's always been red, red, and red.

In college, I spent hours defending my cosmetic habits to my feminist friends, who accused me of buying into patriarchal conceptions of beauty. I knew, however, that they didn't quite understand why the contents of that tiny red tube were so vital. It was about making an active choice about my own gender expression in a way that made me feel all at once powerful, beautiful and uniquely feminine.

These days, alongside my graduate studies, I've also begun to learn at Yeshivat Maharat, a seminary seeking to confirm Orthodox women as halakhic and spiritual leaders.

The program is going well so far, days spent with my head buried in ancient rabbinic texts, exploring and wrestling with the complex nuances of Jewish law. A few weeks ago, however, something happened that struck a particular nerve for me. I was sitting and eating lunch with a colleague of mine in between classes, and we were having a discussion about what the appropriate attire should be when performing ritual duties. Considering the controversial space the Yeshiva already occupies in a broader global Orthodox context, we agreed that though our clothing choices should not completely hide the fact that we are, in fact, sexual beings, anything too provocative was inappropriate.

I paused for a moment and gestured towards my lips. "What about my lipstick?" I asked nervously, almost unwilling to hear her response.

She paused.

"Maybe pick a different color," she said.

And thus entered a complication into my morning rituals. I thought about the women who have preceded me and moved on to become spiritual leaders, activists, and strong voices in their communities. I meditated on the ancient rabbinic texts I review every day, which often indicate a fear of female "otherness" and sexuality.

I don't want to disappear into the folds. I seek to bring the entire expression of myself—not a compromised or compartmentalized version of me—to all of my pursuits. The thought of ducking into the bathroom to wipe off the lipstick before I go to teach Jewish texts is troubling to me. We live in an era when Orthodox women are finally studying to be members of clergy—this, in and of itself, is wildly radical. It seems like this era should also be able to accommodate a broad diversity of women committed to this risky work—women who have loud voices and love bright colors, women who are comfortable with who they are and what they bring to the table.

DASI FRUCHTER

"My behavior bothers them."

For 30 years The Jerusalem Rape Crisis Center has been committed to assisting and empowering victims of sexual abuse, as well as raising social awareness of the prevalence of violence against women. The Center has run over 1000 workshops, and the hotline receives 5500 calls a year. The Center runs training courses for educators, preparing volunteers to go into Israeli schools and run workshops for students. Since November, I have been spending one morning a week in secular Israeli public schools running interactive workshops with students in 7th–12th grade.

Recently, when I met with a mixed-gender group of 9th graders, there was one boy who sat with his arms crossed the whole time. He didn't speak. He was obviously a kid with a lot of social power, of the kind that does *not* involve participating in class. At the end of the hour-and-a-half workshop, we went around the room, and the students were supposed to share something they'd learned, or that surprised them. When the exercise got to him, I held my breath, waiting for him to say he had learned nothing, or to ask if he could pass. Instead he uncrossed his arms, sat forward in his seat, and said with remarkable earnestness (in Hebrew of course, but I'll translate), "Today I learned that I need to pay attention to whether things I do bother others, and if I notice that my behavior does bother them, I know I need to stop." Now, I wouldn't deliver the message in quite those words, but really what he said got to the heart of the education we are doing. It is exciting to see that the main points of the workshops are finding their ways into the minds and hearts of even the most hostile students.

To learn more about the Center, visit *ww.1202.org.il/English*. To donate, visit *http://www.israelgives.org/amuta/580001261*.

NOMI TEUTSCH

IMAGE COURTESY OF PFLAG

The Mom Who Invented PFLAG

Jeanne Manford, founder of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), died in January. She was 92. In 1972, this modest, bespectacled elementary school teacher, got fed up with how a homophobic world was treating her gay son, Morty. She marched side by side with him in a Greenwich Village parade. She carried a hand-lettered sign that read PARENTS OF GAYS UNITE IN SUPPORT OF OUR CHILDREN. These plainspoken words, coming from the depths of a Jewish mother's heart, galvanized the nascent gay rights movement. Soon, Manford found herself leading a grassroots group that eventually became PFLAG, a national organization that today has more than 200,000 members. Morty died of AIDS in 1992. In a eulogy to this remarkable woman, the openly lesbian news commentator Rachel Maddow said that because of Manford, gay pride parades today are full of "totally normal, average, straight parents" publicly proclaiming their love for their kids—a sight that never fails to bring Maddow to tears.

ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

The HBO series "Girls" has been a trending topic all year, but in one sense it's nothing new. Created, written, and directed by the twenty-six-year-old **Lena Dunham**, who plays the wannabe memoirist Hannah Horvath, "Girls" is merely the latest in a set of culture-rattling narratives about young women, each of which has inspired enough bile to overwhelm any liver… Because such stories exposed the private lives of *male* intellectuals, they got critiqued as icky, sticky memoir—score-settling, not art. (In contrast, young men seeking revenge on their exes are generally called "comedians" or "novelists" or "**Philip Roth**.")

EMILY NUSSBAUM in The New Yorker, 2/11/13.

PHOTO: MARK SELIGER/HBO

In Vienna, Jewish Feminists Gather

In February, more than a hundred European Jewish women, joined by a sprinkling of Americans and Israelis, convened in Vienna for the sixth international Bet Debora Conference. More than a decade ago, as German Jewish life surged anew after the Berlin Wall came tumbling down, activists seized the moment, bent on inserting feminism into the emerging Jewish world.

So that European Jewish feminists could meet and share ideas, they founded Bet Debora. Since 1999, a series of conferences, loosely organized around themes like Jewish women and the synagogue or the Jewish family, had been held in Berlin and Budapest. But, the last, in Sofia, Bulgaria, was back in 2009.

About a year ago, **Sandra Lustig**, a translator and writer born in the U.S., and **Eleonore Lappin-Engel**, who teaches in the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Graz in Austria, set out to re-invigorate Bet Debora and bring it to Vienna, a city at the historic political and intellectual crossroads of Europe.

Over three cold and snowy days, Jewish feminists discussed the conference theme of *tikkun olam*, examining how Jewish women, in the past and the present, have contributed to bettering the world around them.

Some were very frank about their ambiguous success. **Svetlanta Yakimenko**, representing Project Kesher's network of 3,500 women in the Former Soviet Union, reported how, when a mosque in the Crimea was defaced, Project Kesher gathered 5,000 signatures of support for the chief imam. But, when the "mainstream" organizations sat down to discuss the problem, Project Kesher, deemed an organization only interested in women's issues like sex trafficking, was not invited to the table. **Sharon Shenhav**, director of Israel's International Jewish Women's Rights Project and a pioneer in representing *agunot* in rabbinical courts, emphasized that substantive and sustaining change can only come with political power. A workshop led by Professor **Andrea Pëto** of Budapest's Central European University, who is also co-president of the European Association of Women's Studies, reflected angrily about the marginalization of gender studies in European Jewish Studies.

My personal highlight was giving the keynote at the University of Vienna. We were celebrating the launch of *Jewish Intellectual Women in Central Europe, 1860–2000*, a new book edited by **Judith Szapor**, Andrea Pëto, **Maura Hametz**, and **Marina Calloni**.

Taking as my theme "Making Women's Histories," (also the title of my newest book), I began by reflecting on the life of **Elise Richter** who, in 1897 had been one of the first three women admitted to this University. When, in 1907, this pioneer in academia became the first female university lecturer at an Austrian or German university, she had to keep her opening lecture a secret for fear that anti-Semitic and anti-women factions would disrupt it. As the Germans marched into Austria seventy-five years ago, she was expelled from the university to which she had dedicated her life.

We, the women of Bet Debora, could sit at the University of Vienna and learn about this pioneer of feminism's first wave, linking Jewish feminists of Europe across the generations.

What Bet Debora made clear is that European Jewish feminists have much work ahead. About 8,000 Jews belong to Vienna's Jewish community, but very few participated in the conference. Were they put off by the topic? Or, since the conference was affiliated with Or Chadasch, the Liberal Jewish Community, were intra-Jewish communal politics at work?

But, the good news is that the organizers of Bet Debora are forging ahead. They have plans to create a permanent structure, to reach out to younger women, and also to have their next conference in two years. I am already planning to go.

PAMELA S. NADELL

From left: Svetlana Yakimenko, Director of Project Kesher; Rabbis Judith Edelman-Green (US/UK/Israel), Eveline Goodman-Thau (Israel), and Tamarah Benima (Netherlands).

PHOTOS: MALIN KUNDI

Jamaica Kincaid Is Still Jewish

Kincaid is resistant to chance. She despises ambiguity—she says she doesn't believe in forgiveness and that when she makes a promise, she always keeps it. She was taken aback when people asked, following her divorce, if she planned to renounce her Jewish faith. Raised as a Wesleyan Methodist, she converted to Judaism in 1993.

"People ask me if I'm still a Jew and it's like, do you think Judaism is a fashionable skirt?"

JESSICA WEISBERG on the publication of **Jamaica Kincaid**'s new novel *See Now Then*, February 5, 2013, from *Tabletmag.com*.

Grin and Wear It

If you squint, there is actually something to it—the "Don't Blame, Don't Complain" campaign. It appears to be sponsored by the Jewish Women's Renaissance Program (JWRP), though it's also being actively promoted by Aish.com. After all, individual lives might well be improved by looking on the bright side, at least once in a while. But, like every laundry detergent commercial ever created has taught us, even if a message could be universal and helpful, it's worth noting when it seems like it's being delivered only to women. To a feminist—to *this* feminist—that's problematic.

To be fair, the Aish.com YouTube video doesn't picture only women. (You can find it easily; just search for "Where's the Salt.") There are kids, and men, who all appear as the (female) narrator explains that we, all people, should stop feeling entitled, understand that God doesn't make mistakes, and learn to stop complaining. How? Well, with a nifty orange bracelet that can help you remember to do as *Pirkei Avot* recommends and be happy with your portion. Don't complain for three weeks, and if you mess up, change wrists and restart the clock. Clearly, these bracelets were meant to evoke the **Lance Armstrong** "Live Strong" originals (not the best marketing ploy at the moment), but in spite of the relative diversity of the Aish.com video, the "Don't Blame, Don't Complain" campaign seems to actually be targeting a specific audience—women.

Given that the JWRP is best known for offering tours of Israel specifically designed for women with children at home, it can seem unclear how "Don't Blame, Don't Complain" fits into their larger aims. However, their mission also charges Jewish women to "bring values back to the world." They even frame this charge in historical terms: "just as Jewish women were the leadership of the feminist movement in the 1970's that created real social change, so too Jewish women must be the leaders in a new social movement based on values."

Is it admirable to grin and bear life's difficulties? Maybe. Is holding back your complaints about the lack of salt at a summer picnic a good goal? Maybe. But too often, one man's trivialities are another woman's civil rights. Think about abused women, especially in the Jewish community, who for far too long have been told to stifle their pain and anger for the sake of "shalom bayit"—peace in the home. Or the silencing of Jewish women who have wanted to come forward to receive treatment as substance abusers. Encouraging Jewish women not to complain both misconstrues the historical model of feminism that the JWRP claims to be fulfilling and stifles the voices of dissent that have brought Jewish women (and their communities) to the fruitful, creative, engaged places where they are today.

MELANIE WEISS

From the Lilith blog

Are Adoptive Families Persecuted in Our Myths?

Recently I attended a daylong symposium about adoption. The keynote speaker was Dr. **Debora Spar**, president of Barnard College. The topic of her address was "Adoption and Its Critics."

Her speech floored me. I had not realized that adoptive families felt culturally persecuted. She presented two theories behind why people oppose, or feel so much discomfort with, adoption. The first: the cultural meme that adoptive parents are bad people, which she traced back to the stigma against barren women, historical myths of stolen children and changelings, the fact that adoption often involves more overt exchanges of money than does family formation by birth, and evolutionary anthropological ideas that people shouldn't be inclined to invest heavily except in their own flesh and blood. She also pointed out that you can barely find a story of an adoptive family in which the adoptive parents are not awful, using orphaned Harry Potter as a prime example.

The second was the cultural meme that adopted children are bad people, which she traced back to cultural misgivings about genetic unknowns, the human tendency to assume that their own genes wouldn't be a problem but that foreign genes might be, and to the media's handling of adoption, especially the disproportional amplification of "bad stories," and still probably poorly understood concerns about attachment disorder and identity development.

Dr. Spar closed her talk by asking for positive media and pop culture portrayals of adoptive families. The room quickly came up with Superman, perhaps Batman, and Horton Hears a Who, then ran out of steam. There seem to be reasons for the traditional and omnipresent trope of the orphaned hero, but perhaps it is time for some new stories.

TARA BOGNAR

It's true that Sandberg has had a charmed career, and she admits as much in her breezy book (written with **Nell Scovell**). But as she'd be quick to remind us, women tend to feel "lucky" if they've achieved professional success. Men tend to simply think they deserve it.

She recounts a question-and-answer session with students at her business school alma mater in 2011:

> "The men were focusing on how to manage a business and the women were focusing on how to manage a career. The men wanted answers and the women wanted permission and help."

JANE EISNER on **Sheryl Sandberg**'s new book *Lean In*, March 6, 2013, from *Forward.com*.

Deborah Lipstadt on the Powerful Debut of Two New Israeli Legislators

I have listened to myriad political speeches in my life, most eminently forgettable. Few, if any, have left me moved almost to tears. When I read and then watched **Ruth Calderon**'s debut speech to the Knesset in February I found myself shaking my head in wonder, with my eyes brimming.

I have watched Calderon grow into a stellar leader. She has a Ph.D. in Talmud from the Hebrew University, one of the most rigorous and demanding Talmud departments in the world; it's the one fictionalized—with a kernel of truth—in the Academy Award-nominated film "Footnote." She has created two outstanding secular institutions—Elul in Jerusalem and Alma in Tel Aviv—where traditional and non-traditional Jews can learn together, experiencing how the study of rabbinic teachings can be far more than a scholarly enterprise, uplifting and invigorating and instructive for all Jews.

Calderon's was one of two astonishing speeches given during this round of inaugural Knesset member talks. The other was by new Labor Party M.K . **Merav Michaeli**; she is a journalist and the granddaughter of Yisrael Kastner, who negotiated with Adolf Eichmann to rescue thousands of Hungarian Jews and was assassinated in Israel in the 1950s. Michaeli presented herself as an unabashed feminist, and she raised consciousness even by alternating feminine and masculine forms in the Hebrew of her debut speech. She declared that a goal of feminism is to build a more just and equitable society for all, especially those who in Israel are underrepresented and oppressed, including people of color and those disabled, among others. She eloquently challenged her listeners to pay attention to—and share their resources with—the have-nots.

Both the Calderon and Michaeli speeches were unprecedented cultural events. I felt as if—hope springs eternal even among those of us who study Shoah and genocide—this might well be a marker in the history of the State of Israel.

The Calderon speech was a moment when secular or, for lack of a better term, non-Orthodox Israelis stood up and took possession of Jewish tradition and heritage in the most public and official of forums. Those who had for far too long looked upon anything that smacked of tradition with contempt and anger—and if I had to live in Israel under the thumb of the *Rabbanut*, the Orthodox religious authorities, I too would be brimming with contempt and anger—proclaimed: "It is our tradition too. We own it as much as the woman with her head completely covered and the man with the black Borsalino hat perched on the back of his head. Not only are we co-owners, but we rejoice in it as you do."

Ruth Calderon captured the attention of a state and a people; the video of her speech has gone viral on YouTube. I watched in disbelief and in joy as M.K. Yitzhak Vaknin, a member of the right-wing religious Shas faction, commented aloud as Calderon taught a passage of Talmud during her speech. When someone from Calderon's own party, Yesh Atid, berated Vaknin for interrupting, Calderon corrected her colleague and proclaimed: "I welcome participation in *divrei Torah*, study of Torah." We witnessed something most Shas members and other "black hat" Jews vehemently oppose: men and women studying Torah together—and in the Knesset, no less! But Vaknin was so caught up with what Calderon was teaching that he could not restrain himself. For that brief shining moment two Jews from opposite ends of the religious spectrum were brought together, not by fear of a common enemy but by a shared love of our tradition and its pivotal text.

Ruth Calderon (shown here teaching at the Alma Center) and journalist Merav Michaeli may be the engines of change in Israel today.

Not only did he participate in her Talmud teaching but, when she ended her talk with a prayer, he passionately and enthusiastically answered, *Amen*. For a Haredi Jew to answer amen to a women's prayer in such a public setting, a place which might be described as the epitome of Israel's public square, was breathtaking.

Let us hope that Calderon's speech and Vaknin's reaction remain far more than just a passing moment. May the day soon come when the most remarkable thing about such a speech is just how unremarkable it is.

V'chen yehi ratzon, and so may it come to be.

And let us all say, Amen.

DEBORAH LIPSTADT is Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies at Emory University. Her most recent book is *The Eichmann Trial* (Schocken/Nextbook). She is currently writing a book on the history and development of Holocaust Studies.

PHOTOS: LESLIE STERNLIEB

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her party, *Yesh Atid*, but in-
her secular and religious Israe-
udy—she, a secular educator,

Now we must imagine a split screen: on
side is a close-up of a female character,
oman with one tear running down her
ek. On the other side, sitting on a rooftop
Mechoza, is Rabbi Rechumei, dressed
rely in white and feeling holy. You know,
r several hours without food we feel very
lted. He studies Torah on the roof, under
stars, and feels so close to the heavens.
sat on the roof, and as the tear falls from
the woman's eye, the roof caves in under
him and he falls to the ground and dies.

What can I learn about this place and my work here from Rabbi Rechumei and his wife? First, I learn that one who forgets that he is sitting on another's shoulders will fall. ...

I learn that often, in a dispute, both sides are right, and until I understand that both my disputant and I, both the woman and Rabbi Rechumei, feel that they are doing the right thing and are responsible for the home. Sometimes we feel like the woman, waiting, serving in the army, doing all the work while others sit on the roof and study Torah; sometimes those others feel that they bear the entire weight of tradition, Torah, and our culture while we go to the beach and have a blast. Both I and my disputant feel solely responsible for the home. Until I understand this, I will not perceive the problem properly and will not be able to find a solution. I invite all of us to years of action rooted in thought, and dispute rooted in mutual respect and understanding.

I aspire to bring about a situation in which Torah study is the heritage of all Israel, in which the Torah is accessible to all who wish to study it, in which all young citizens of Israel take part in Torah study as well as military and civil service. Together we will build this home...

him in. His wife anticipated him: "Here he comes. Here he comes." He didn't come. She became upset. She shed a tear from her eye. He was sitting on a roof. The roof collapsed under him, and he died.

Rabbi Rechumei—a rabbi, a rav, a whole lot of man ["rav" can mean "rabbi" or "much"]. "Rechumei" in Aramaic means "love." Rechumei is derived from the word "rechem," womb, someone who knows how to include, how to completely accept, just as a woman's womb contains the baby. This choice of word for "love" is quite beautiful. We know that the Greek word for "womb" gives us the word "hysteria." The Aramaic choice to take the womb and turn it into love is a feminist gesture by the Sages.

....He could be found, that is, he studied, he was accepted for study, in the great yeshiva, one of the four yeshivot, the Ivy League, of Babylonia: Nehardea, Mechoza, Pumbedita, and Sura. He studied at Mechoza; he studied in the presence of Mechoza's *rosh yeshiva*, who was so well known that he was called Rava. In Aramaic, an aleph at the end of a word denoted the definite article. Rava was "the Rav," "*the* Rabbi."

He would habitually—I suggest that the Sages do not like people who do things out of habit; in general, when someone in the Talmud does something regularly, someone dies within a few lines. He would habitually very often.

You are probably thinking: what kind of date is that to choose to come home? Yom Kippur Eve? It is not exactly a day of intimacy. It is generally a day of prayer, and not even at home.

One day, one time, one year, the topic drew him in. The study in the *beit midrash* so fascinated him that he forgot. He did not leave in time. He could not abandon his studies and he did not go home. His wife anticipated him: "Here he comes. Here he comes." One can hear the aspirant tone of her words in Aramaic: "*Hhhashta atei*; hh-here he comes." This expectation, that every text message, every phone call, every footfall, every knock at the door, you are certain is him. Here he comes. Here he comes.

He didn't come.

At some point, she realizes that he is not coming this year. Perhaps the shofar blast announcing the onset of Yom Kippur was sounded, after which nobody would arrive, due to the sanctity of the holiday. She becomes upset. This woman, who waited all year, who for many years has waited all year for one day, cannot stand it anymore. She becomes upset. She is disappointed; she is sorrowful; she loses control. She sheds a tear from her eye—this is an active verb, not a passive one. She allows one tear to leak out of her eye onto her cheek, after years of not crying.

Translated for the Jewish Week (jewishweek.com) by Elli Fischer. Used with permission.
Watch videos of the full Knesset addresses by Calderon and Michaeli in Hebrew with English subtitles on YouTube.

Period Envy

by SHEILA SOLOMON SHOTWELL

My period of period envy began when I was six years old. Bubbe wouldn't let Mom or my sister, who was ten years older than me, water the plants at certain times of the month.

They always blamed bitchiness on "periods," and right in front of my watchful eyes they casually rolled up their bloody Modess sanitary napkins into neat bundles swaddled in toilet paper. Then they'd pin a fresh one into the crotches of their waist-high undies either because they didn't know about elastic belts with metal clips or they were just too cheap to spring for them.

Once I learned about the belts with trusty metal clips, I began checking on them in the ladies' aisle every time we shopped at Rexall Drugs. Compared to safety pins, I found them titillating, and knew for certain that I'd own at least a couple of them one day. I also made sure that my Barbie chose the belt over pins. My ready-for-any-occasion Barbie had sanitary protection made out of her white elbow-length evening glove which was kept in place with her gold lame belt. She never had to worry about embarrassing leakage. I had a couple of Barbie accessory packs, so there was no chance of Barbie spotting on her "Barbie-Q" outfit, complete with tiny utensils and chef hat. I couldn't believe that other girls allowed their Barbies to fly around at any event, even "Solo in the Spotlight," with that unshielded café-au-lait-colored crotch.

By fourth grade, I was on the prowl. When I visited friends with older sisters, I always checked out their brand. There was something so seductively secret about the whole process. To me, it was the epitome of femininity and translated somehow into being sexy. I lurked about in public restrooms just waiting for a teenager in Patty Duke capris to slip a nickel in a machine marked either Guards, Kotex, or "Modess...*because*." I was never privy to an actual purchase, but I remember sitting in a hospital lobby once when a girl came out of the restroom and asked her older brother for a nickel for his girlfriend who was waiting in the ladies' room.

"Oh, I get it," he nodded as he reached into his pocket with a knowing look. I knew just what was going on, and that girlfriend might as well have walked right out to the lobby in her embroidered "Wednesday" underpants and straddled him on the Herculon chair.

My friend in the apartment upstairs was probably responsible for kicking my curiosity into the intense Period Envy phase. She was in the seventh grade and had an occasional period. Lying in wait on her closet shelf was the most desirable feminine hygiene product of all time: Miss Debs. Not the after-school cookie treat with a similar name, but the slender, soft, pink napkins that were specially designed for young girls. In my imagination, that box of Miss Debs was surrounded by tiny doves with pastel ribbons in their mouths.

Needless to say, I was fascinated by ads in magazines for period products. Tucked in the back, along with recipes for Lemon Jelly Rolls and Bing Cherry Sponge, were Midol ads that promised to dispel "sour mood" along with the bloating. My favorite ads were for Tampax, the true forbidden fruit. My mother spoke of Tampax in hushed tones. I got the impression that only girls with bad reputations used them. If my mother knew where my Barbie was sporting her gloves, and that she answered the door to Ken with her pink negligee flying open, she'd know that I already had a bad rep.

Tampax ads promised that you'd be rid of "telltale odors" and that the "wearer's hands need not even touch the Tampax." Coupled with the promise of no bulging or chafing, how could you go wrong? They even promised you could swim, golf and ride horses with confidence.

THE FIRST TIME I SPOTTED AN actual, real-life box of Tampax, I was in my father's pawn shop. I was sitting on a swivel stool behind the counter peering at the miscellaneous odds-and-ends on the back shelves through a pair of binoculars. When I recall the scene in my mind, I add the theme song for Peter Gunn. There they were in all their glory, nestled right between a chartreuse leopard TV lamp and a box of Ritz crackers. I gasped several times before zeroing in on the side of the box to read the famous slogan: "No Belts, No Pins, No Pads."

It was a defining moment for me for another reason. Yes, the Tampax box confirmed that my Dad did have a girlfriend. This made sense out of my having heard my mother say into the telephone with her hand cupped over her mouth, "She's a slut." Mom and Dad were living separately by then, but still I was Daddy's Girl, and here was very painful evidence of a whole other piece of femininity in my father's life.

OF COURSE, I VIVIDLY RECALL the moment I became a woman. It was winter break and I would turn 12 in less than a month. I was asleep, dreaming that I was in an open, horse-drawn carriage wearing a long pouffy dress with several petticoats and Abraham Lincoln holding the reins. It was just the two of us and suddenly I was aware that blood was squiggling down my legs beneath the hoop skirts. I woke up and pulled down my pink flannel pajama bottoms. There were strands of bloody discharge stretching from one inner pant leg to the next. The day of reckoning had finally arrived!

I don't recall ever using Miss Debs. Maybe they were a 1963 fad. By then it was 1966 and the metal clips on the belts dug into my skin. I went through years of cramps and accidents just like most girls, but it wasn't until I became sexually active that I could effectively insert a tampon. Before that, no matter what I did, the thing popped out.

One day at the beach I allowed my girlfriends to convince me that it was truly "in" and thus safe to go swimming with them in Lake Michigan.

"What's that?" one of them shrieked as she splashed at a puffy white object floating in our circle. I knew instantly and threw back my head laughing.

"I told you I can't use those things!"

Six taut, tanned, tenth-grade boys from our class came barreling at us with a football.

"Go back!" we screamed, convincing them instantly.

They dropped their sunny grins, turned around in unison, and hightailed it back to the sand. The only thing that girl power required back then was the right pitch.

UNLIKE MOST WOMEN OVER 50, I miss my "monthly visitor." There is something so utterly primal and uniquely feminine about the experience. To men, it's a total mystery and I really like that.

At the back of my bra drawer, I still keep one yellow plastic tampon case. It's autographed by the raunchy filmmaker John Waters. I had gotten into the autograph line empty handed after a talk Waters gave at the Ladies Literary Club in Grand Rapids. In front of me, a man held a mannequin torso with flashing electric nipples for Waters to sign, and the director was almost nonchalant as he scrawled his name across the chest. When it was my turn, I scrounged around in my purse and finally pulled out the tampon case.

"What is this?" Waters asked as he pulled it apart and discovered two regulars.

"Two regulars," I said.

His eyebrows arched like two scared cats and a look of great respect crossed his face as he handed it back to me. On the face of the guy with the electric-nippled mannequin, I swear I saw Period Envy. ■

My mother spoke of Tampax in hushed tones, so I got the impression that only girls with bad reputations used them.

Sheila Solomon Shotwell, from Grand Rapids, MI, was a Jewish educator for 27 years. An actor, she also teaches improv to at-risk children and is completing her first young-adult novel.

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All That Remains *of* Etta

fiction by ERICA W. JAMIESON

The saving grace about her mother's house, when Joan had dismantled it last spring with all the birds returning to the greenway, was finding her mother's hand in everything. Little notes, like the one on the newspaper clipping, found in the top drawer of her desk, *Simon Wiesenthal was a good man.* Or the slip of paper, yellowed and torn at the edge, an address for somewhere in Poland, *where your grandfather was born.* Joan had found all the notes—*to Joan, for Lisa, give to Philip.* On the bottom of the silver tea service, which Joan keeps in her living room, the yellow sticky read: *For Joan. You should know Aunt Edith sewed these into the lining of her coat and walked across Europe to escape. Keep, please*, to which Joan had added her own note: *For Lisa when I'm gone.* But there is nothing from Etta. No notes. No last words. No directions of who should get what. Just a cracked teacup she was holding when her heart gave, a closet of tracksuits and housecoats and boxes of things stored in her basement. Even Etta's old cameras and her black and white photos, wrapped three times in bubble wrap, were left to Joan's discretion.

Joan tried. She tried to disburse what she could among Edward's sons and their wives but outside of the new television and a two-year old computer, they wanted nothing. Even the boots in the white and blue Zappos box, never worn and in Merle's size, had been refused.

"They're good winter boots. You should take them," Joan said when Merle stopped by in between dropping her children off at preschool and picking up her mother for brunch.

"Oh, I couldn't take them," Merle had said. "I could never wear a dead person's shoes."

Joan shoves the last of Etta's velour tracksuits into the box for Salvation Army. Left to pack: a few things from the kitchen, some of the older linens and towels, a pillow needlepointed decades ago, the oil painting no one wanted. Joan has been at this so long that the discard pile is beginning to look fresh and she catches herself eyeing that needlepoint pillow for her living room. Enough! What she really needs is a good manicure; another two nails broken and the synthetic feel of velour caught in her cuticles. And coffee. She wants coffee. She would dig out the percolator if only she hadn't thrown out that can of Folgers.

But she is almost finished. She should beat the predicted snowfall home and meet Edward in time for dinner. Tomorrow at this time, the condo will be painted, the carpet washer is scheduled, and the For Sale sign readied. The last remaining remnants of Etta will be whisked away, bits and pieces of her life redistributed to strangers on the shelves of secondhand stores or in eBay auctions.

As she makes a final survey of her sister-in-law's condo, she feels the chill in the air. The windows have turned to smoked mirror from the darkness outside flecked with bits of frost along the edges. It is cold without the insulation of *things.*

Joan pulls the tissue from her sleeve and wipes at her nose before switching on the electric space heater. A burning smell closes in around her, mixes with a leftover stench of ginger and brine. Joan can still smell the dog. A mix of wet fur and urine.

SUZANNE HODES. "MOTHER THREE TIMES," CHARCOAL, PASTEL AND CONTE ON PAPER. 50" X 92". WWW.SUZANNEHODES.COM

As she makes a final survey of her sister-in-law's condo, she feels the chill in the air. It is cold without the insulation of things.

It had been Edward's suggestion to put the dog down. "She's blind and pees on everything," he said at breakfast on the day of the funeral.

And so two days after Etta was buried, Joan had carted the dog, the little white shih tzu, to the vet. She sat with the dog in her car for almost an hour. When she finally went into the vet's office, she signed the forms to have the office dispose of the carcass and then returned to the task of packing up Etta's things.

"Did I get it right?" Joan says to the empty condo as she reaches for the last roll of packing tape and the scissors with the blue handle. She is startled by a knock at the door and drops the scissors to the floor, just missing her foot.

At the door is an elderly woman. Her face is slightly tanned, and she is wearing a black fur hat with wisps of gray hair curling out from underneath the rolled edge. Her coat is made of thick black wool that is familiar to Joan. *My mother's coat*, she thinks. Like a talisman for survivors, Joan remembers that her mother, her aunt, her grandmother, and a neighbor—she actually remembers a neighbor's coat from when she was small—all wore black wool coats to temple on Saturdays. The woman standing at Etta's door has petite hands that are gloved in black leather. Dangling from her right hand is a red leather leash.

"I've come for Leyke," she says.

At first Joan thinks this woman is talking about the old camera equipment. *Was there a Leica in the box? Did I drop it off for resale? Did someone take the cameras?*

But before Joan can answer, the woman says, "I am Mrs. Rutzel. I am here for the dog, Leyke."

And in that instant, Joan remembers the dog.

The elderly woman standing in front of her has a slight Polish accent, and her voice grazes at Joan's heart, and with a slight hesitation, Joan cannot help but think she has seen this face in one of Etta's photographs.

"Please come in," she asks Mrs. Rutzel.

"No," Mrs. Rutzel says. "I just need the dog."

"It's so cold out here, maybe you should come in."

"Thank you, no. I should have been to the funeral. I was in Boca and saw the paper, the *Jewish News*? Even in Florida you can get the Detroit issue! Ach! I am so sorry for Etta, may she rest in peace. She wanted for me Leyke. I tried calling, to make the arrangements, but the phone. It is out of order? So I come. The dog, please." Her w's sound like v's so that everything she says has a hard edge to it, and yes, Joan remembers how quickly everything

was turned off, Etta's phone, her cable, the Internet service. She will wonder later why she knew nothing of this Mrs. Rutzel, never heard her name, never knew Etta had a friend, a visitor! Joan will remember later having seen unaccounted-for and unexplained waxed bags of cookies from a bakery in Oak Park, and she will think about all of the things overlooked and not known.

"We put the dog to sleep," she tells Mrs. Rutzel.

"To sleep?" says Mrs. Rutzel. "To sleep?"

"No one wanted to care for the dog; she was old. So we put her down. The vet, we had her put down?"

"She's dead? The dog? *Nebekh*, the dog, she is killed? You killed little Leyke?"

"We put her down."

"Down? Killed? She is gone?" Mrs. Rutzel's bewilderment is contagious, and Joan finds herself disbelieving the dog is actually gone: Perhaps the vet hadn't gotten around to it yet; perhaps it didn't take.

"They do that with gas?" Mrs. Rutzel asks.

The wind has begun to stir around the two women, one standing on the inside of an open door, the other on the outside. *Vit gas?* she asked. Joan is mesmerized by the start of a light snow, so early, and thinks about the killing. The dog.

"No. No. They do it by injection. Not gassed, the dog wasn't gassed. She was put down. Humanely," says Joan, thinking of the blue streak of numbers that ran across her mother's arm, visible only in summer when she slept in a white linen slip, and thinking that a similar row of numbers must exist on Mrs. Rutzel's arm as well.

"I am so sorry. I didn't know. No one said anything to me about you." Joan picks at her cuticles, drawing a drop of bright blood just at the edge of her middle finger.

"*Gvalt!* To kill a dog? Why? Mrs. Rutzel's gloved hand, the one that does not hold the red leather leash, rises to her face. She holds her reddening cheek in her hand.

"If I had known…please come in, it's so cold," Joan says, opening the door wide, gesturing to Mrs. Rutzel to step over the threshold. *Coffee*, Joan suddenly thinks again. *If there were coffee, something to eat, she would come inside, they'd straighten this out—what's to straighten? The dog is gone.*

Mrs. Rutzel shakes her head, and the leash dangles in the quiet of snow falling, bells for the dead.

"Mrs. Rutzel, please," says Joan. "It was a mistake." It was all a mistake. Standing in the white cold, a leash dangling, Joan struggles to remember some conversation, any conversation, she had with Etta in which she asked more than *Do you need paper towels?*

"*Oy!* What a mistake!"

Joan whispers again, "It was a mistake."

Mrs. Rutzel, her hand still on her cheek, her head turning slightly from side to side, says only, "That Leyke, you know, she loved the cookies from the Polish bakery. Ach! *Nebekh*. Poor *hintele*."

Swirling skies of white snow grow heavier around the two women, and Joan's vision is blurred by the thick downfall. Cookies for a dog, and Joan remembers her mother handing her a cookie meant for a dog but eaten instead by five-year-old Joan. She thinks about the pudding, the warmed pudding freshly made from milk—*use half jar sugar, Joan dear, and some whole milk always*—that her mother stirred up to take the bitter taste of the dog's cookie away.

In Mrs. Rutzel's gaze, her blue shining eyes, Joan feels her own disbelief at the hours spent relegating things, damn things, clothes and books and tchotchkes, and all the while it was the dog. The snowflakes have accumulated now on Mrs. Rutzel's black hat, her black-covered shoulders, each flake so different than the next, yet with the heat of Mrs. Rutzel's body, the flakes attach to each other and become a scarf knit in white just before they turn to droplets of water and time becomes fleeting liquid embers that burn through a mass of congested heartbreak. "I didn't know." *I didn't know!* But she understands there is nothing more to do, as Mrs. Rutzel walks back to her car, saying into the falling snow, "No dog. No Leyke. Poor *hintele*."

Joan will remember later having seen unaccounted-for and unexplained waxed bags of cookies from a bakery in Oak Park.

"Wait. Wait," Joan yells as Mrs. Rutzel opens her car door. Joan holds her hands up to the air as if her open palms to the sky and to God as her witness can stop time. Joan runs back into the house; she yells one last "Wait, please" to Mrs. Rutzel.

In the house, Joan grabs the needlepointed pillow. Out to the car, slipping once on the wet walkway, she is breathless and crying when she reaches Mrs. Rutzel.

"For you," she says, gasping bits of cold air, "please, for you."

Joan hands Mrs. Rutzel the pillow and hopes she doesn't notice the small yellow stain on its backside.

"What is this?" Mrs. Rutzel says, although to Joan it sounds like Vos is dis? And the sound of the hard v stings.

Please, Joan is thinking. *Take this pillow. Forgive me the dog.*

Joan bends into the car and embraces Mrs. Rutzel. She holds onto the wool of her black coat, and she whispers into her ear.

"My mother was from Zloczow."

Inside the condo, Joan puts on her coat, her scarf, and tries to shake off the chill before she goes back outside. She turns off all of the lights. She unplugs the small floor heater. From her purse she finds a black Sharpie pen and writes in thick letters on the side of the box *Take it all.* When she leaves, she makes sure the door is unlocked for the Salvation Army and then she is gone without ever looking back. ■

Erica W. Jamieson writes fiction and essays. She is at work on her first novel.

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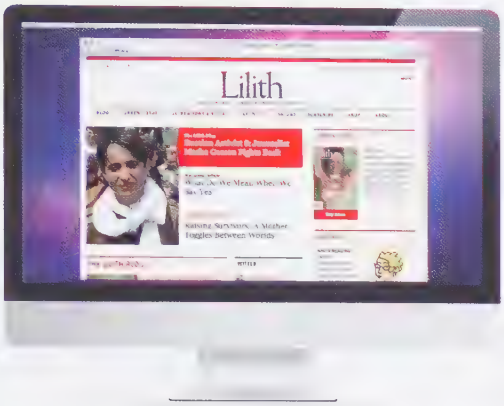

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OUR VIOLENT

by ILANA KRAMER

When Adam Lanza murdered 20 schoolchildren and 6 adults in Newtown, Connecticut—including himself and his own mother—parents everywhere hearing the news tried to imagine how they could keep their own children safe if there were a "next time." But some parents had another, deeper fear as well: the fear that a child of theirs might be the potential perpetrator of such a violent act.

"I love my son. But he terrifies me," wrote Liza Long, in "I Am Adam Lanza's Mother," her haunting account of parenting a violence-prone child. Her piece went viral on the Internet. It turns out there are many parents able to imagine a child who, like Long's son, phones from an inpatient psychiatric unit saying, "I hate you. And I'm going to get my revenge as soon as I get out of here." And many of the same parents could also imagine getting the call she received from her hospitalized son three days later, when "he was my calm, sweet boy again, all apologies and promises to get better."

The parents of violent children have much anguish and few resources. Liza Long practically sobs it out: "No one wants to send a 13-year-old genius who loves Harry Potter and his snuggle animal collection to jail. But our society, with its stigma on mental illness and its broken healthcare system, does not provide us with other options. It's time for a meaningful, nation-wide conversation about mental health." In the Jewish community this conversation has been stalled in part by parental shame, guilt and a sense of alienation from others who all appear to have "perfect" children. But some parents have found Jewish resources as they frantically try to understand and protect their loved but frightening boys.

Interestingly, no aggressive daughters surfaced in this admittedly limited sample of parents willing to speak—most anonymously—about their families. Perhaps, as research shows, females tend to turn their rage inward, with self-harming behaviors like cutting. Here, five brave Jewish mothers of violent sons speak out, not selflessly but as part of a bargain – their stories for your open ears.

Ilana Kramer is a writer and clinical psychologist who specializes in trauma. She lives in Brooklyn.

CHILDREN

"He'd ask us to lock him in his room so he wouldn't hurt anyone."

LUCY PRITZKER

My son always needed a lot of attention as a baby. He had separation anxiety earlier than most kids, and it never went away. He couldn't sleep by himself. He couldn't take no for an answer. He would perseverate; if there was something he wanted, he couldn't move on. He didn't make friends. If he saw a group of kids playing with a toy, he'd run over and steal it or kick them, instead of asking to join in. He hated transitions, and any change in routine. He held it together in school but would save it for us at home. The minute I'd pick him up, he'd be screaming, biting, cursing, pulling my hair. There would be physical tantrums for the whole rest of the afternoon. When my son was in first grade, we went to Jewish Family Services. They told us it was family dynamics, behavioral issues, and parenting issues, but no one could explain why he had this moodiness.

FROM "MODERN AMULETS-THE KABBALAH OF BLING," ART BY YONA VERWER. WWW.YONAVERWER.COM

The summer after my son finished third grade in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, things got really, really bad. He was fascinated by the knives in our home and threatened to use them. We locked them up. He would beg us to hold him so he wouldn't hurt himself. He would poke himself with sharp objects or ask us to lock him in his room so he wouldn't hurt anyone else. There were a number of weeks we were restraining him for so long that we just couldn't keep up with it. We were held hostage by his behaviors. He's a good, good boy, and he didn't want to live like that either.

That summer I made the hardest decision I ever had to make. Our family couldn't maintain itself, our other kids had to stay with our parents. So that's when we hospitalized him. Which did nothing. It took him out of our home, so *we* were safer, but he was in a psychiatric hospital, and his issues were seen as behavioral. One doctor said to him, "Where did you get the idea that acting this way gets you what want?" And he said, "I'm not doing it to get what I want." After 10 days in the hospital, he came out with the same symptoms, so he himself asked to go back in. I started to focus on finding alternatives to hospitals, because the hospitalizations were more traumatic than the behaviors. We ended up in a residential treatment center in Texas, the first place that saw this as a neurobehavioral issue, rather than a parenting issue. When he began unraveling again at home, we started thinking that he's is a kid who's able to maintain himself in a structured environment that even the best parent can't provide. We took him off his medication the summer he was 10. People disagreed. Psychiatrists disagreed. But even though he was still irritable, moody, and oppositional, he didn't rage anymore.

We enrolled him in a private school, the Hampshire Country School, in New Hampshire, for gifted boys who can't maintain themselves in a traditional school setting. He gets a lot of adult attention and structure—small dorms, four or five boys with a dorm parent. It's not a therapeutic boarding school, but it is a boarding school that's therapeutic. My son is 13 now, and six of the 20 kids in his school are Jewish. Jewishness is always part of who he is; he loves tradition because he loves the laws and what he can and cannot eat. (He sometimes keeps kosher at school, and other times is too hungry, he says.) One of the staff members helps him study for 10 minutes a day for his *parsha*. There's a tutor who comes to the school to teach him for his bar mitzvah in 2 months, on the campus. It's going to be me, my husband, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and staff.

We were Conservative, but belong to a Reform synagogue now. Our Temple Sholom of Fanwood, New Jersey, was very open about what they could do to help us. When the rabbi and his son came to our home with a freshly baked challah, it was so nice. I remember my son holding the warm challah. We would

get phone calls from Jewish families, people calling, saying "I have a brother like this." People did offer help and came forward. I made a point of speaking out in my temple community and beyond. That's what kept us going. My first instinct was to feel shame, but I couldn't let that happen, because I knew it wasn't a shameful thing. There are kids whose needs can't be met by local services. One thing we had to come to grips with was that we couldn't provide it within our family. I think our mental health system is about family preservation, keeping kids at home and delivering services there. But for us, family preservation was about having his needs met outside the home to preserve our family. I was so afraid he wouldn't be close to his siblings, but the opposite is true. We're closer. We've preserved the relationship.

"He got the message that if you exhibit violence, you're in trouble."

MARJORY NEWMAN*

If anyone can benefit from our suffering, I am willing to share our experience.

My father was mentally ill, and when my mother wanted to leave him, her family's response was, "It would be a *shanda*—a shame—in front of the *goyim*." I understood as a little girl that if I went forward and spoke about being sexually abused by my father I would be judged badly as the daughter of such a man. I understood this hierarchy of the Jewish community. As a child, I was very involved. I belonged to a Conservative shul, and derived a lot of strength from this, but not because I brought my problems there. There's a difference between deriving benefit and seeking help.

> **The very worst thing he ever did was pull a knife on me. I would never have had a gun in the house.**

My own son became a lightning rod for a dysfunctional family. He was highly irritable and cried for the first nine months, and I was an overwhelmed mother, so that's how my relationship first formed. I had periods of bonding, and loving times, but his temper tantrums began at age four. I never adequately dealt with the abuse by my father, so it was difficult when rage was directed at me by my own child. My interior experience was that of a frightened little girl, not a mother who knew how to handle him.

My son had learning disabilities, and as he got older, the violence got worse. By 15, he was out of control with a mood disorder, attentional disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder. Part of it was, we didn't set proper boundaries; he refused medication, and we did not take steps where he would have been required to take it. It was also the mental health system, his biochemistry, and us not knowing how to handle the stresses of a mood disorder and a learning disability. He has no doubt that I loved him, but I was a flawed mother.

The very worst thing he ever did was pull a knife on me. I would never have had a gun in the house. I called the cops and he ended up going to the E.R. and having a psychiatric evaluation. I didn't bring criminal charges, but he got the message that if you exhibit violence, you're in trouble. Another time, the cops put him in straightjacket. That traumatized him. Another time he punched in the wall. I recognized that his behavior was extremely dangerous. I agonized over the idea of involuntary commitment, and I didn't do it. With hindsight, I should've done it.

He managed to make friends in elementary school that he's still very close with. Thank God he was able to have a peer group. I think his ability to form a close circle of friends saved him from acting out beyond the confines of our home. If he'd had only the taunting from others for his special needs, then we might have, God forbid, a kid who went beyond. While we were lucky that no one was injured from my son's rages, I felt that we just weren't getting adequate help. Our story is not simply about a mother or parents who didn't make the right decisions. I was well aware of the limitations of the mental health system. I often received conflicting advice. There were many occasions when the school did not implement his IEP because they lacked the resources or did not have people capable of doing what needed to be done.

And I never would have gone to the Jewish community—because of my sense of being judged. In the worst of it, I did go to the rabbi at our temple, and he was very responsive; he even came to the house, and did not make me feel ashamed. On an individual basis, the rabbi was appropriate and caring. But the Jewish community was different. I was very involved in local Jewish organizations and in a professional community as an attorney, and I wanted to *hide, hide, hide*. All the things that the Jewish community values… I couldn't rest on my children's laurels. I was very aware of that. The values and standards held by the Jewish community isolated me, because my children couldn't meet them.

In Judaism, there is this notion of *tikkun olam* that each of us has an obligation to repair the world, individually and systemically in the community. Practically, I rolled up my sleeves, consulted with experts, researched the problem, wrote about my own experiences, and that Jewish value of problem solving and learning offset some of the feelings of powerlessness, despair, and shame.

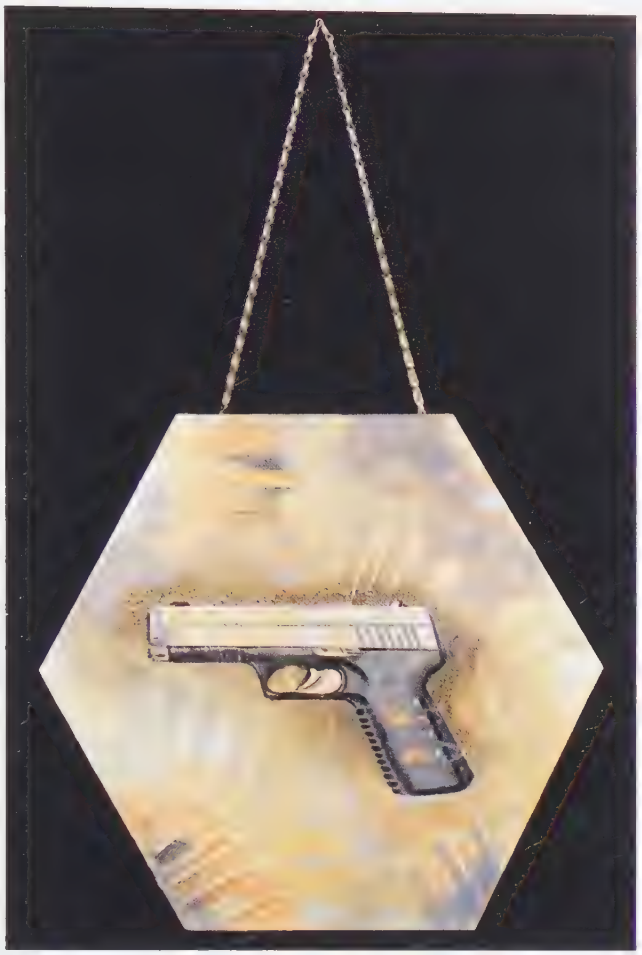
"He's an adult now, and I decided to walk away from him"

ELLIE SHAPIRO*

I like to think I was a good mother, but my son told the psychologist that I didn't love him. Growing up in Israel, he didn't want me kissing or hugging him. It was hard to get around him—if I put him in his room, he said he liked it in there. When he was a teenager we credited the behavior to puberty—you know, "difficult teenage years," but two incidents stood out as extremely severe, and then everything backfired.

When our son was 16, he failed his driving test, and was so upset that he stopped going to school. He stopped eating—at least

*Names with an asterisk are pseudonyms.



with us. He would go through the food in the fridge with his fingers in the middle of the night, and we'd see the signs in the morning. He would barricade himself in his room whenever he was home. It was the most unusual thing I'd every seen. We had the school principal and the psychiatrist come to our home. Nothing worked. Then after two and a half months of this, he walks into the living room and asks to borrow the car. Well, he had passed his test, unbeknownst to us. It was the first time we saw danger. He asked for my car as if nothing had happened. That was a red light.

The second warning sign came when I left the country to be with my dying father. After one month, I sold my part of the family business. When my son found out, there was a lot of verbal abuse. He said, "How could you? That was my money." The week of shiva, I was devastated, and my son shoved me across the room. I'll never forget that. It was the illness manifesting itself.

At age 25, while visiting relatives in another city, he assaulted a policeman and was taken to jail. It's heartbreaking to see your soft-spoken boy in such a marginal society. We flew to him to jail with a letter testifying that he had a personality disorder. We told him he could come back to us, but only on condition he went to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist called it "schizophrenia simplex," not full-blown schizophrenia. But my son refused to go consistently. My son was unable to act in the society as you and I can act.

Soon after he moved home, he attacked my husband, and I remember being so scared I wet my pants. We bought him his own apartment, and he met his wife, who was a godsend to us, but he wasn't going to the psychiatrist anymore, and the situation just deteriorated. He had delusions and was violent. Last year, he attempted to murder his wife, and when I helped her go to the police and he learned the full story during court proceedings, he left threatening phone calls, blaming me for contacting the police.

Last summer, I had a heart attack, and because of that I decided to walk away from my son and his schizophrenia. I cannot help him. Only he can help himself. He is capable of making decisions. For 18 years my husband and I tried everything, and he always came back to square one because he refuses to take medication. As long as he refuses to go for help or take medication, I realize there is nothing I am able to do.

The way I got help for myself was to talk—a support group is vitally important. I used good friends when I needed to cry. There is no shame—I have a sick son, and that's the bottom line. It's very sad for us. But there is no blame, only wonder: Did I cause it? It doesn't matter, it's what we have today.

"We drove to the yeshiva, and I told him, 'You hit me once, and it's once too many.'"

RIVKAH MILLER[7]

I read that "I Am Adam Lanza's Mother" piece and thought, I could've written that. I left my son's father when the boy was four years old, and his father was back in his life at seven. That's when my son became suicidal. Even before that, he didn't know what to do with his emotions, and I could see he was struggling with them, so I started him in therapy at five and half. When he became suicidal, he used to go to the roof and threaten to jump. I told him it was my job as his mom to keep him safe, and if he kept doing this, I'd have to take him to the hospital.

When he was eight, we went to a friend's house for Shabbos. This family lived on the 15th floor and he threatened to jump, and I realized I couldn't control him. It was on *Yom Tov*, a religious holiday, but I looked at my friend and said, "You take my other two kids." I picked him up, took my car keys and wallet, and I said, "We're going, I'm taking you to the hospital." I pressed the elevator button, and he watched me break every law—holding money, using the elevator, driving the car—just to keep him safe. That was the last time he threatened suicide.

But by age nine, my son's rage turned outward toward me and sometimes toward his siblings. The only reason he could turn his anger outward, and not hurt himself, was because of his therapist. That summer I found him a Jewish sleepaway Boy Scout camp that I thought he would really enjoy. They called me after a week and said, 'You have to come pick him up." The next day on the phone, he was calm as anything and very loving. He told me, "Nothing happened, Mommy. All I did was swore." But he goes into insanity. At camp, he had threatened, "I'm going to hurt you guys, I'm going to run away."

Eleven was the breaking point. the year he became more violent. He hit me, and my first reaction was to hit him back, but I

stopped myself. My own therapist said to get him out of the house. I asked my neighbor, "Can my son sleep over tonight?" I told him, "Right now I'm too angry at you and I'm going to hurt you, so you need to leave." He went to the neighbors, and the next day to school. That's when I called the police. The police said they could write it up, and that was the hardest thing I had to do, to open a police file on my son. We drove to the yeshiva, and I called him out of class. I told him, "You hit me once, and it's once too many."

When he was 13, he went into one of his fits. We never knew what would trigger him. He's an outdoorsy boy, and had an outdoor knife. He started walking around the house with the knife. I told him, "You have to put your knife away," and he took the plate of food one of my other children had prepared for Mother's Day and threw it across the floor. I told my two other kids to leave the house, and I called the cops. My neighbors went crazy that I called the cops. But the cops have people trained in domestic violence. One said to me, "We usually come in when blood is gushing, and that could've happened here." He asked me what made me call early, before the bloodshed. I knew it would only get worse. He could never use that knife again. I threw it out. The police told my son the potential consequences. My son thought I was crazy, but it was the last time he was ever, ever violent. I took him out of his Jewish day school in sixth grade and I ended up finding a Jewish program with a lot of exercise for 7th and 8th grade kids at risk for being at risk.

I think the frum community believes that our Jewish children are not violent, and that we have a better understanding and we have better control over our children than in mainstream culture. When I found a Jewish school for at-risk boys, the teachers at my son's former school said, "What are you doing to your son?

The frum community believes we've got better control over our children than in mainstream culture.

You're stigmatizing him." Meanwhile, the rabbis were saying my son wasn't that bad, and why would I do that? I raised $50,000 to get him to stay in this alternative school. I asked the community for money, the shul, friends of friends. I was that desperate. I wish the frum community would open their eyes around this. There's so much silence. Instead of stigmatizing our children, we should be creating schools for children at risk. We forget that emotional health comes first, and everything else is secondary. The day my son pulled a knife and I called the police, my neighbors were furious, they went to the rabbi of our shul and complained that "The single mom is crazy." Their issue was that I called the police in my Jewish community and showed others that our children are whatever they are. But these neighbors didn't show up at my home and say, "Maybe we can help?" The only thing they did was run to the rabbi and say how insane I was.

Now when he's angry, my son gets on his bike and rides it. I tell him, there's nothing wrong in feeling violent, it's how you control it. I don't know why I'm so lucky that my son turned around, but I know the times he saw me breaking the norms—driving on Shabbos, calling the cops—that's when the shift happened.

"He got paranoid. He threatened to stop being Jewish. Then he fell in love with Nazis."

ANITA BERG*

My son was born with a range of developmental disabilities, and needed therapy to help him walk, eat, speak, and understand what people were saying. By the time he was 11, he'd had 10 different diagnoses. Aspergers? HFA (High Functioning Autism)? ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)? From 18 months, he would scream inexplicably from something later diagnosed as sensory integration disorder. By the time he was five, social situations also seemed to trigger rages that were like storms. He would burst out angry, sobbing, "Mommy I want to kill myself. There is this monster inside of me."

By the time he was nine, his anger was getting physical. Once he tried to choke a seven-year-old girl who was teasing him. When he wasn't like that he was so sweet, it was very complex for us to understand the violent outbursts.

We felt we had a terrific network of friends, but as the issues became worse, we withdrew. What happens is that you are just not invited anywhere. Extended family members would say, "Why can't you control your son? I remember the deadening, heartbreaking moment when my sister told me we could no longer come to her seder. She actually said: "I could never have a Seder with your kids." Imagine!

At home when I tried to calm him, he started pushing me, getting violent. At school, kids got a kick out of making him explode, but his reactions were becoming a serious danger to everyone, including himself. By seventh grade, our son was labeled with Aspergers.

We fought the school board to fund a placement into a residential program, which his current school recommended. On his first night, he witnessed a kid taken to the hospital after a suicide attempt. Our son's roommate was low-functioning autistic, and had been abandoned. In our boy's mind, he would be next. No one at the school was trained in Aspergers treatment. After all the evaluations, no one was closer to helping solve our son's illness, or helping him move safely into society.

We took him out of boarding school, moved to Ohio, and decided to put him into mainstream school. He had a high average IQ and would be repeating ninth grade. With support from a therapist, he seemed to grow socially just by being around neurotypical people. But on another level, he began experiencing anti-Semitism coming from other kids that made him feel ashamed of being Jewish. Kids threw coins at his feet at Rosh Hashanah, and at Pesach. Some kids called him a Christ killer. My son wanted very badly to have friends, yet he was frightened because he knew about the Holocaust. He had always loved building the sukkah, but at Sukkot that year, he ran out into the backyard and screamed, "Take that down! Someone will

WHY DOES EXPRESSING VIOLENCE FEEL SO ALIEN TO JEWS?

by RABBI SIMKHA WEINTRAUB

My son is not violent but has certain special needs—and I am very aware of how the default strategy for us as parents is to struggle alone, behind the closed doors of one's apartment instead of seeking help. That's considered "normal," that's what one senses from others as "advisable"—a misplaced kind of "rugged individualism"—and I imagine that if you were to tell people about a violent child, people would recoil and avoid you or the child, or both. And within the Jewish community, mental health conditions are sometimes not given the same urgency as medical conditions. If a kid broke out in a rash, they'd rush him to a dermatologist—but if a kid is violent, they might first wait and see. This hesitation comes from feelings of stigma and shame.

It's such a *shanda* for there to be violence in the family; we have this idealized version of ourselves that we hold onto. The Jewish community reflects the community at large, but historically ethnic Jews from Eastern Europe didn't have the repressed culture and mores of Jews today who are trying to be more "civil." Partly, it's the middle- and upper-middle-class expectation that a "proper" person doesn't express strong emotions, so violence of course is off the charts. A Jewish child is supposed to become a professional, marry, have children and be independent. That expectation, and our community's competitiveness, feed the denial and shame that many families experience.

The reasons for the stigma against violence in the Jewish community are multi-determined. In Jewish culture we seem to have more room for sadness than for rage. When do you get to express aggression (let alone rage) in Jewish life? At the Pesach seder you ask God to empty His rage and "pour out His wrath against the nations that have known You not"—so you hand it over to Him. I guess there's beating the willows of the lulav on Hoshanna Rabbah, and drowning out Haman's name at Purim, but that's pretty much it. Our general culture is socialized for women to express sadness and men to express anger, so you might say that the Jewish community is socialized to be "women." I think that this comes from our having been the victims; aggression feels dangerous and out-of-bounds for many reasons, so rather than finding ways to help parents with an aggressive child, many may turn away, both out of fear and out of a sense that this feels deeply unfamiliar to Jews. We've been the victims of violence over and over and over, and anything that smells of violence challenges our history as victims, and for some Jews this challenges our narrative.

> **In Jewish culture we seem to have more room for sadness than for rage.**

The last thing we want to be is identified with the aggressor, any kind of aggressor.

And yet, there are profound Jewish resources for dealing with children who appear prone to violence; to name six:

- Community is at the top of the list. We have synagogues, schools, agencies, JCCs, organizations, which can be important partners for education and services.
- Education, since Jews tend to be well-educated and hence somewhat familiar with mental health issues and, indeed, are significant players in the field of mental health.
- Historical survival skills, so there's a basis for a communal conversation about surviving (and even transforming) violence.
- *Teshuvah*—repentance and renewal, our commitment to giving people another chance, believing in the possibility of change and growth.
- Torah stories like Cain and Abel, or about Joseph and his brothers, or Simon and Levi—which name the problem and can be a prism for exploration and understanding.
- *Chesed*—the response of lovingkindness, to care for those who are suffering and help them feel less alone and isolated.

Is the Jewish community doing its job? I don't think we're past step one. The first step is to name this issue and not be afraid of it, so that, for example, someone who's brave enough can post an ad, "I have a Jewish son who's violent...I need a Jewish circle to talk about it."

The second step is finding or creating a circle. I know of a shul that has an informal network of people who have found each other; "The Miserable Families Club" gets together, informally, to talk about the challenges in their families. The "Miserable Families" idea is a way to start talking to one another.

The third step is to design supportive programs and services. I know of one rabbi who set up a room off the sanctuary, literally "the sanctuary off of the sanctuary," for kids who can't sit still. Rooms like that become spaces to help children appropriately release energy and ultimately to regain control; it helps parents find respite and support; and it helps the synagogue make good on its promise to be "a house of prayer for all people." (Isaiah 56:7). What could we design for families where there has been aggression and violence from a child? Proverbs 22:6 urges us to take into consideration children's different paths and profiles in educating them in Torah.

Overall, Jewish families need to know that there is no obligation to endure abuse, and that there is a community to help. ■

Rabbi Simkha Weintraub is Rabbinic Director of New York's Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services.

see it, and they might hurt us!" His paranoia worsened, and in December he said, "If you put up Hanukkah lights, I will stop being Jewish." We didn't know how serious he was. After we were finished, he came downstairs very quietly, and said, "I don't give a fuck what you Jews want to do." After that, he refused to come to Shabbas dinner until the lighting of the candles was over. And then, he fell in love with Nazis. This was astonishing and terrifying and I had nobody to talk to. I had nobody to get help from. The Jewish community here said, "I don't believe it."

Now we know he has a very severe anxiety disorder. At the time, it was just really terrifying to suddenly have a son who was not only verbally threatening, prone to rages, but now spewing anti-Semitic remarks, working hard to make friends with classmates by sharing racial slurs towards other groups.

Even with all this posturing, he was still socially "off." In tenth grade, this is when the hitting started. He felt he had a girlfriend, and saw her kissing someone else. When he hit me the first time, he hit my arm and this escalated to the point that I was afraid of him. He was like a roaring lion, he got right up in my face, he pushed me to make me do what he wanted to do. My husband was afraid to leave me when he had to go away for trips. One day, my son broke down my door, and I was terrified. At that point, my extended family knew, and they were very afraid for my life.

At school, there was sympathy for him as a special needs student, but when we sought help for his more violent behavior, I didn't want to tell the school because my instinct was that if they knew, he'd lose that sympathy.

Soon after, we called the hospital because he was threatening suicide. I told the ER about the abuse, and our son was put into a psych ward for 30 days. I had to fight to keep him at hospital. I told them, it is still not safe for him to come home, but they said he's fine. After 30 days, they sent him home, so I moved out for a month for my safety. They told me, "The only way to get him more help is if he hits you again." There's really no protection for the battered parent. Zero. Nada.

The response of authorities drives parents underground, and leaves families in worse shape.

The response of authorities drives parents underground, and leaves families in worse shape. Four months later, he hit me in the head and I called it in. The social workers described him as a batterer. No one considered whether our son had initiated violence, or only reacted to the behavior of others. I'll never forget one social worker who said, "He'll be behind bars in a couple years." I was certain he wasn't a monster, but something in the environment was overwhelming him.

He was kicked out of high school because he was seen as a threat. Finally, we found a contained classroom within a larger school where he had an option to move into mainstream, and someone came in to give him speech and language services. He's 20 now, and the happy news is, he's graduating from high school this year. I know he is not a batterer, but he is reactive and very insecure.

There is one thing that was and still is shockingly absent, which is Jewish—based treatment facilities. We had been very connected to our different temple communities. Over time I discovered that many Jewish families in my shul had these "dirty little secrets" of kids who had struggled with drugs or out of control behavior or developmental disabilities, and people just didn't tell anyone, because there was no public acknowledgement that these behavioral illnesses exist in the Jewish community and help is available.

And God help you if you are an adoptive Jewish family, as are several of the friends I met in my Asperger parents support group. Then the Jewish community really questioned whether your child was "the bad seed"—the implication was that behavior like that could never come out of a Jewish womb.

The Conservative and Reform movements must step forward and create therapeutic residential programs, outpatient and parent support programs, online forums, and training for shuls so families can figure out how to be involved in Shabbat and even get respite care to attend. Yes—respite care! Is there respite care from the Jewish community? Zilch, nada, zero. And there needs to be a lot of education for everyone that parents of out of control kids are not the cause of the kids behavior. ■

WHAT IF MIRIAM HAD CLIMBED UP THE MOUNTAIN AND LEFT MOSES WAITING WITH THE MULTITUDES?

Would the commandments be a softer thing
written with a wing-like stroke, an incantation
of phrases ordering the day?

Was it the brash way of Moses that brought down
the heavy hand of heaven thrusting and weighty,
so that only stone could sustain the inscription?

If Miriam had climbed the steep slopes bracelets tinkling,
exchanges whispered in those highest of altitudes
would we now have a list of suggestions?

And if Moses had stayed below bringing order to those
lost tribes gilded with abandon would we have been left
to wander forty years, never arriving into sweetness?

When Miriam descended Sinai, would her scarves
have shone incandescent on the breeze, her tambourine
sonorous, her voice decrying love, gratitude, blessings
and the exact directions to the promised land?

Would we have settled in those hills—
families, tribes and strangers, granting
new names to the lands, weaving a tapestry of laws,
leaving the unforgiving thunderous burden of stone
on the mountain, far beyond anyone's reach?

SHANA RITTER

Who knew that the 19th century feminist novelist — decidedly not Jewish — was the woman who helped shape the women who shaped me?

Reading George Eliot in Jerusalem

by ILANA BLUMBERG

Recently, holed up against the rain and wind of a Jerusalem winter, I asked my husband, who was headed to the library stacks of Hebrew University, to try to find me Volume III of The Letters of George Eliot. Eliot, the author of *Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda* and *The Mill on the Floss*, is perhaps the most intellectual of the Victorian-era novelists; she is certainly the one I love best.

He returned triumphant, and time passed quickly as I lost myself to *The Letters*—the "characters" known, the dramas identified, everyone's gifts and flaws in high relief. Outside my window, the rain and sleet looked positively London-like, and I had to remind myself that I didn't have to get to the British Museum any time soon.

Suddenly my two-year-old pitched a bowl of pretzels to the floor and the book fell from my lap, an ancient slip of paper escaping the equally ancient envelope on the inside of the back cover. It was the sign-out card. Pre-bar code, pre-computer printer, this was a typed index card. Title, author, Library of Congress code, and four lone, faint signatures. The wonder of the human signature!

In block-penciled letters, "SHALVI." February 22, 1958. Another check-out six years later, also Shalvi, November 1964. Then another gap of six years, November 1970—the month following my birth—and now, more of a penned scrawl, "A. Gottlieb." Ah, George Eliot, I thought, you genius, you organizing principle of friends, societies, communities of thought and feeling. And a last signature, "Margalioth," no date.

I was dumbstruck. It was thoroughly conceivable that no one had used this volume in the last half-century except myself, Alice Shalvi, Avivah Gottlieb, and one unidentified friend. Shalvi and Gottlieb (now Zornberg) are Jewish heroines for our times. I held the index card aloft; it was an announcement of sisterhood.

I first encountered Avivah Zornberg when I was 18, studying at an Orthodox girls' seminary in Jerusalem. Nothing was going right. I couldn't stomach the lectures about women's "modesty" nor concede that marriage and childbearing were just around the corner. I envied my male friends at the great houses of study (male only), learning side-by-side with those who'd devoted their entire lives to Torah. It was a wilderness of disappointment until I encountered Zornberg, a scholar who was making new meaning out of Torah, poetry, philosophy, and history, and who invited me, for two hours a week, to come with her.

Two years later, as a student at Barnard College, I discovered a feminism that seemed irreconcilable with my life as an Orthodox Jew. And just as unexpectedly as Avivah Zornberg had appeared in my life, so, too, did Alice Shalvi. I had gone alone to an Upper West Side brownstone to hear Shalvi speak, and she outlined a feminist activism that was compatible with my Orthodox practice. Seeking support for her newest project, the Israel Women's Network, Shalvi described an advocacy group that was relentlessly addressing the problems of women's status in Israel, from their positions in the military to their pensions to their acute under-representation in the Knesset. Taking a pen from my backpack, I signed on to get IWN mailings.

As I sat in my Jerusalem apartment with this unexpected new circle of intimates, I began to wonder. What was it about *The Letters* that had selected the three of us as readers? What were our common sympathies—of literature, of sensibility, of gender—that united us, in spite of the different worlds into which we'd been born?

Alice Shalvi, the first reader on my index card, recipient of the prestigious Israel Prize, was born in Germany in 1926 and escaped to England with her family in the early 1930s. She studied English literature at Cambridge and social work at the London School of Economics, laying the groundwork for a lifetime of sensitivity not only to text, but to the inequities of the world.

After immigrating to Israel in her early twenties and earning a doctorate in English Literature at Hebrew University, she was a professor there for over 40 years; she also founded the English department at the then-outpost of Ben-Gurion University. She married and had six children.

As principal of Jerusalem's Pelech School, Shalvi pioneered teaching the Talmud and other advanced sacred texts to religious girls, an innovation that spread to other girls' schools and set the stage for women to intervene in the previously all-male rabbinic discourses that are central to the workings of Jewish law in modern Israel. When she later took the position of Rector of the Conservative movement's Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, it signaled to feminists in the modern Orthodox world that we could expect little change from within Orthodoxy. Shalvi works as well for greater social and political equity for Arabs and Jews.

Once, years ago, I was a guest at Shalvi's home for Shabbat dinner. The very-Catholic novelist Mary Gordon was there (she'd been my mentor at Barnard) and we talked about the Pope, Catholic politics, and Shakespeare. We did not talk about the political or intellectual future of Jewish girls and women, or of the likelihood of reconciliation between feminism and traditional Jewish practice. Still, as we left the Shalvis' home, Gordon said to me, "You see? You really are not alone."

It was thoroughly conceivable that no one had used this volume in the last half-century except myself, Alice Shalvi and Avivah Zornberg.

With *The Letters* in my hand, I wondered about the connection between Shalvi and Eliot. As a girl, Eliot had been ardently evangelical, but she grew up to articulate a form of faithful humanism instead of Christian deism. She engaged with all the philosophical, theological, scientific, and historical issues of her age, and she emerged with the exquisite, long-lived, mid-Victorian novel.

More especially, perhaps, Eliot wrote novels about girls and women born into a moment that was not yet ready for them, who yearned to "shape their thought and deed in noble agreement," as Eliot put it in *Middlemarch*. Women's "human hearts" may have been "beating to a national idea," Eliot wrote, but no public or epic life was available to them. If it were available, Eliot said, it would doubtless preclude a life of marriage, love and family.

It made perfect sense, I thought, for Alice Shalvi to read her letters more than once.

From the hands of Shalvi, *The Letters of George Eliot* passed six years later to Avivah Gottlieb. Raised in Scotland in a venerable rabbinic family, Gottlieb, too, studied English Literature at Cambridge—she actually specialized in Eliot. Rather than

pairing literature with social work, though, as Shalvi had done, Gottlieb coupled literature with a deep engagement in classical Jewish sources; she had first discovered these sources with her father and had then pursued them further at Gateshead Seminary.

Zornberg, like Shalvi, made *aliyah* to Israel, where she married and had three children. Like Shalvi, she lectured in English Literature at Hebrew University, but then she changed direction and began teaching Torah, first in private homes in Jerusalem and later at many Jewish institutions, most devoted to women's study. I met Zornberg two years earlier than I met Shalvi, and, like many women who cross her path, I've considered her a formative teacher ever since. While Shalvi engaged my political and social awareness and struggles, Zornberg spoke to the part of me that embraced the existential, the spiritual, and the poetic.

I think George Eliot would have been drawn to Avivah Zornberg – perhaps as a character...

As long and varied as Shalvi's biography is, Zornberg's is powerfully focused. In both her books and her teaching, Zornberg creates an entirely new genre for the study of Bible and midrash, a form responsive to what she calls the "murmuring deep"—the hum, that is, of what the text leaves unsaid. Zornberg's approach would not have been immediately intelligible to Eliot, coming, as she did, before Freud and Lacan. But I think Eliot would have been intuitively drawn to her—perhaps as a character, certainly as a peer. Both writers merge their intellect with an uncanny ability to convey compassion for the human experience

In her books, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis; The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious*; and *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus* (two have won the National Jewish Book Award), Zornberg gives voice to the tragedy and pathos of human life from the Bible to our own day, to the difficulty of finding a path in a world where God's presence feels muted and our steps are shadowed by doubt. Here, I think, George Eliot nods her head in agreement.

Unlike many popular lecturers, Zornberg teaches above the heads of many of her listeners, taking inspiration from a startling array of thinkers. George Eliot did likewise. As Anthony Trollope put it, she "fired above the heads of her audience."

While Zornberg rarely speaks of feminism outright, her writings, like Eliot's, clearly derive from being born into a world with no obvious place for a woman like herself. Both women hear the "roar on the other side of silence" that Eliot associated with moving out of moral stupidity into a sense of the primacy of others' lives and needs. Neither Eliot nor Zornberg were actively political, but in their books and their lives they are deeply and intrinsically so.

Here in Jerusalem, there is a street named after George Eliot, most likely because of her proto-Zionist novel, *Daniel Deronda*; required reading for many Israelis in the 1950s. But that name was actually a pen name. The writer signed the majority of her letters at mid-life "Marian Lewes." Most readers assume Eliot took this pen name because women's books wouldn't sell as well as men's, but that's historically false. By the third quarter of the 19th century, approximately 75 percent of English novels were written by females, with males only regaining the field near the century's end.

Marian Lewes took on her pen name because she was a radical. She braved the storm of familial and social censure to live with a man who remained in an open marriage to a woman who herself had a lover. Shalvi's and Zornberg's lives could not be further from this; they chose marriage and motherhood. But never mistake traditional lives for non-radical propositions; both have forged extraordinarily bold paths for Jewish women.

When I pick the library card up from the floor on that snowy Jerusalem afternoon and then rescue it from my small daughter's tight grasp, I wonder if it would be wrong to keep it. Hebrew University will, after all, eventually standardize its bar codes, as books slow to be checked out make their appearance at the circulation desk. Someone will likely throw the card away.

Neither my name nor my husband's is on the faded card, which seems right to me. And I don't know who "Margolioth" was or is, in spite of Google. I know only that the name means "pearls" in Hebrew, something Eliot, who studied Hebrew, would have known, too. Untold histories merge with told ones, as do multiple countries, religions, languages and eras. Marian Lewes never had biological children of her own, but among us she has many daughters. I find it fascinating that some of her most notable children are Jewish women raised to be both Orthodox and modern.

When I close *The Letters of George Eliot*, setting the index card to hold my place, I remember that as a girl, I, too, loved to write and receive letters. What I loved was the stirring back-and-forth, the question-and-answer, of people not in the same place, but also entirely in the same place.

I will keep the index card. ■

Ilana Blumberg is associate professor of humanities at Michigan State University and the author of Houses of Study: A Jewish Woman among Books, *winner of the Sami Rohr Choice Prize. She is currently on sabbatical in Jerusalem.*

TRUTH OR DARE

Ménage à quatre en kibbutz

by JESSICA BERGER GROSS

I arrived in Tel Aviv in time for my twenty-first birthday, flying a circuitous route from Kathmandu through Dubai to London and then back to the Middle East after a college semester abroad in Nepal. I'd wanted to leave the suburban world of my childhood far behind, and purposefully chose destinations on the other side of the world.

At the airport I strapped on my overstuffed backpack and went to meet my childhood friend and Hebrew school classmate Stefanie. After catching up, Stefanie and I traveled north together towards green hills and orchards and the kibbutz where we'd arranged to spend the summer volunteering.

Out the bus window, and in bars and cafes, I saw them. Men—boys, really—my age and even younger, in uniform with guns slung like messenger bags over their shoulders. I was sexually inexperienced; I'd lost my virginity to my first real boyfriend at age 19, whom I'd callously broken up with in the fall of my junior year so that I could see the world—and discover what it was like to have sex with other men—but I hadn't so much as kissed someone during my time in Nepal. Now the tall, dark and handsome men of my imaginings—an irresistible contrast to the funny-nerdy, hipster-brilliant, impossible-to-decode Woody Allen types I encountered at my liberal arts college—were here, within reach.

Stefanie and I got off at the bus station—the last stop—and hitchhiked over to the kibbutz.

Roger, the volunteer coordinator, greeted us in his office—a clean and orderly shack far from the members' living quarters—and handed us work clothes: blue shorts that we were to pair with white t-shirts or tank tops.

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"I'm signing you both up for the dining hall," Roger said, pointing to the work rotation sheet posted on the wall.

"Is there any way I can work outside?" I asked. I'd pictured myself in the fields.

"Start here," Roger said, patting me on the shoulder. "Prove yourself, and we'll see." In exchange for our six days of work a week, the kibbutz provided three meals a day, laundry service and a small living stipend for what would prove to be the kibbutz essentials: beer, cigarettes and condoms.

Out the bus window, and in bars and cafés, I saw them. Men—boys, really—my age and even younger, in uniform, with guns slung like messenger bags over their shoulders.

I never wanted to leave. Days began early with breakfasts of fruit and toast and cream cheese with chopped tomatoes and cucumbers picked the day before. My first week I cleaned toilets, mopped floors and scrubbed down tables; by week two I was promoted to the kitchen for peeling, slicing, mixing and grating. On week four I was moved into the fields. In the mornings I sipped hot coffee and shared a pre-dawn breakfast with the young men from the kibbutz I'd gotten drunk with the night before. After breakfast we climbed into the back of a truck and headed off to pick fruit and check irrigation pipes. I'd never been happier. I liked seeing dirt on my hands; I liked feeling useful and physically wrung out at the end of the day. I loved being part of a society that was based around something other than what I saw back then as suburban striving for status and money. Kibbutz members were farmers and cooks, accountants and teachers, parents and laundry attendants; at least theoretically, all were equal in the community.

After work—we were done by two or three—I'd spend the afternoon napping in my room, the air so thick and heavy with heat and humidity that by the time I woke up there'd be sweat stains on my pillowcase. I'd put on my swimsuit, grab my towel and book and head to the pool until dinnertime. The volunteers took up one side of the grass, the older members the other—I'd look across and watch the kibbutz children running in and out of the pool, the couples falling asleep on their towels, and let myself daydream about staying, about working in the fields by day and writing books in the afternoon like the Israeli novelist Amos Oz. Before dinner we'd quickly shower and change, and after closing out the dining hall we'd hang out, smoking and gossiping before heading down into the bomb shelter that doubled as the pub.

After a beer or two, the Israelis would arrive. Kibbutz women generally kept clear of the bar, but men from the kibbutz, men on the make, would come down looking for easy-to-pick-up girls. Volunteers like me. For these guys—newly returned from military service and unattached, or the occasional slightly older guy who should have been home with his girlfriend or wife—the bomb shelter pub was like a stocked fishpond.

There were two men who stood out. Ari and Dov. They were the heartthrobs of the pub, proud sons of the kibbutz. Ari was blonde and sexy and arrogant; Dov was brown-haired and shy, more poetic, exquisitely built, long and sinewy. They were best friends. Dov had an on-again, off-again girlfriend in Tel Aviv. Ari had a new conquest every time a fresh batch of volunteers rolled through.

I'm not sure why Ari picked me that summer, but I felt lucky, special. Our relationship consisted of meeting in the pub and then heading back to his place. I told myself that I would hang out with him and have fun, but not sleep with him. The rules my mother had taught me were still in my head—date Jewish boys; don't sleep around ("Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free?" she'd admonish); get a boyfriend and a law degree; be a good girl. Ari was definitely not my boyfriend—he wasn't even that nice to me. But it was exciting to argue with him, to exchange electrically charged banter, to skinny dip at two in the morning. And it felt great to be seen with him—occasionally I even let myself imagine that I could somehow make him fall in love with me. Mostly we fooled around, petting and pawing, like high school kids. Ari hadn't pushed things sexually and, besides, I had a secret crush on the more soulful-seeming Dov, though he and I hadn't moved beyond kibbutz pleasantries—*Do you have a light? Could you pass the baba ghanoush?*

One night down in the pub, I was sitting on Ari's lap listening to bad dance music—"All That She Wants" by Ace of Base played on a constant loop that summer. We were both getting drunk when Ari suggested we go back to his place and finally have sex. The complication, in addition to the fact that we'd never even come close before, was that his fling from the previous summer, an intimidatingly pretty former volunteer from Sweden with blonde hair and full breasts, was visiting the kibbutz for the weekend and hoping to stay at his place. He made it pretty clear that he was suggesting our first night together as a couple be a threesome.

"You've got to be kidding me."

If I wouldn't have sex with Ari on any old pub night, why on earth would I agree to a ménage à trois?

"What, tell me, *tagidi li*, are you scared?"

Of course I was scared. I was also turned on. I took a look at Dov who was seated at the next table—a leather necklace grazing his tanned neck, the self-tapered and cuffed black jeans and

the slight pompadour-like lilt of his hair—and came up with a radical proposal of my own.

"On one condition. You bring Dov, and we make it a foursome," I answered, as if we were organizing a bridge game. I wouldn't go all the way with Ari in the context of our flimsy to non-existent relationship, I concluded, using the logic of a buzzed 21-year-old, but a night of group sex during my summer adventure fell into a different category.

Ari grinned, whispered in Dov's ear, and grabbed a bottle of vodka from behind the pub bar.

The four of us went back to Dov's room.

"Let's play Truth or Dare," I suggested. Somehow, I'd become the initiator.

Really I was just channeling my inner Madonna.

"Ari and Dov, I dare you to kiss," I said.

Unexpectedly, they took the dare. A joke—and then it wasn't. Lips touching, then lingering, until the depth of their friendship, their boyhood bond, the army years, turned the kiss unexpectedly tender and real—beautiful, even. It didn't take long until we were all in bed. Moving from one to another, swapping partners—first Ari and me, then me and Dov. The Swedish woman reached for me and I kissed her back, feeling the unexpected soft weight of her breast in my hand. What happened between the four of us was consensual if vaguely dirty, friendly but devoid of love, hot though lacking in the sensuality that comes when you care, when you know someone. But I didn't feel ashamed or like I'd been used. I felt as powerful and as in control sexually as those soldiers I'd seen out the window had seemed. I felt alive. The next morning was Shabbat, our day off, and we all went to breakfast together, hung-over and half shy.

The following day, Sunday, I went back to the fields. It was time to pick apples. In the orchard we were paired up, one person climbing up the short ladders to harvest while the other held the ladder before carrying the filled baskets of fruit back to the truck. Stefanie and I were partnered up; we still hadn't talked about why I hadn't come home on Friday night. I knew what she'd think without having to ask.

But I didn't feel like a bad girl; I felt like a woman. Over the next several years, I'd continue to explore my sexuality. There would be plenty of non-Jewish boyfriends, and there would be more flings—the housing co-operative parties in Madison, Wisconsin, that became excuses to kiss each one of my roommates I had a crush on; the sculptor in Iowa who took me out for beers and grilled cheese and kissed me all night in his car during a summer thunderstorm; the broke and beautiful hipster band manager who spent New Year's Eve with me in Brooklyn after I finally dumped my latest not-so-good-for-me boyfriend.

I've been married 10 years now, to a Jewish man, and am the mother of a five-year-old son. It's been more than a dozen years since I've been with anyone other than my husband. The sex we have these days—when we make time to squeeze or schedule it in between parenting and working—is deeply familiar, intimate, emotional, and comfortingly predictable. When I look back on that long ago night in Israel, I regret nothing. ■

Unexpectedly, they took the dare. A joke—and then it wasn't.... The next morning was Shabbat, our day off, and we all went to breakfast together, hung-over and half shy.

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Jessica Berger Gross is editor of the anthology About What Was Lost: 20 Writers on Miscarriage, Healing, and Hope, *and author of the yoga memoir* enLIGHTened: How I Lost 40 Pounds with a Yoga Mat, Fresh Pineapples, and a Beagle Pointer. *She writes the Enlightened Motherhood blog for yogajournal.com.*

HER JEWISH ROOTS GROW

by RABBI LAURIE RICE

I WASN'T EXPECTING THE EMAIL FROM CHAPLAIN SCOTT WHEN IT arrived in my inbox one Tuesday morning in November of 2011. "Dear Rabbi Rice, Would you be willing to correspond with a Jewish inmate seeking spiritual guidance and counsel?"

I knew my response: I had no time, of course. I barely managed to respond to my congregants' needs. And yet, when I hit 'reply' to send my decline, I found myself accepting the request instead.

Linda Whitaker wrote to me two weeks later. Or rather, I received my first letter from Linda two weeks later. She likely wrote it sooner, but since the U.S. Postal Service is the only means we have by which to communicate—Linda has no Internet and only highly restricted and expensive phone access—the ancient art of letter writing became our dance.

At first she was serving her sentence at the maximum security Women's Penitentiary in Nashville, where she was just one of two Jewish inmates. In her current location, at the State Women's Prison in Memphis, she is the only Jewish inmate. Over the next year and a half, Linda and I would write back and forth. I would do my best to send her what she needed in the way of Jewish books, study materials, and ritual items. She wanted a tallit, so I sent her one of mine.

Linda was 52 when she was convicted and charged with the first degree murder of her husband. The law in Tennessee requires that Linda serve a minimum of 85% of her sentence, 21½ years. That means she'll be in her early 70s before she is considered for release. She will have spent her 50s and 60s living in a world that most of us can barely fathom, save for what we glean from TV shows and movies.

WE TALKED ABOUT HOW SHE ARRIVED AT THE PLACE SHE IS TODAY—A JEWISH WOMAN SERVING DECADES FOR KILLING HER HUSBAND.

I caught a glimpse of Linda's prison universe from the inside when I visited her this past January. It was the day after her 60th birthday, on a very cold and gray morning. I drove up to the women's prison and passed through the many cell doors that serve to separate inmates from the outer world. I had carefully planned what clothes I would wear: simple, old, colorless. Somewhat like the exterior of the prison itself, which was dull and brownish-gray on the outside, nothing green or colorful growing anywhere. The prison exterior looked to me as I might imagine the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl—stark and lifeless.

I entered the front door carrying only my handbag and a brown paper grocery bag full of books that I had brought for Linda. Like her, most inmates own little or nothing. Each can keep in her cell only what she can fit into a six-cubic-foot drawer under her bunk. And most inmates, including Linda, share the cell with a roommate, so privacy does not exist for yourself or your belongings. You're simply lucky to coexist peacefully with your assigned roommate.

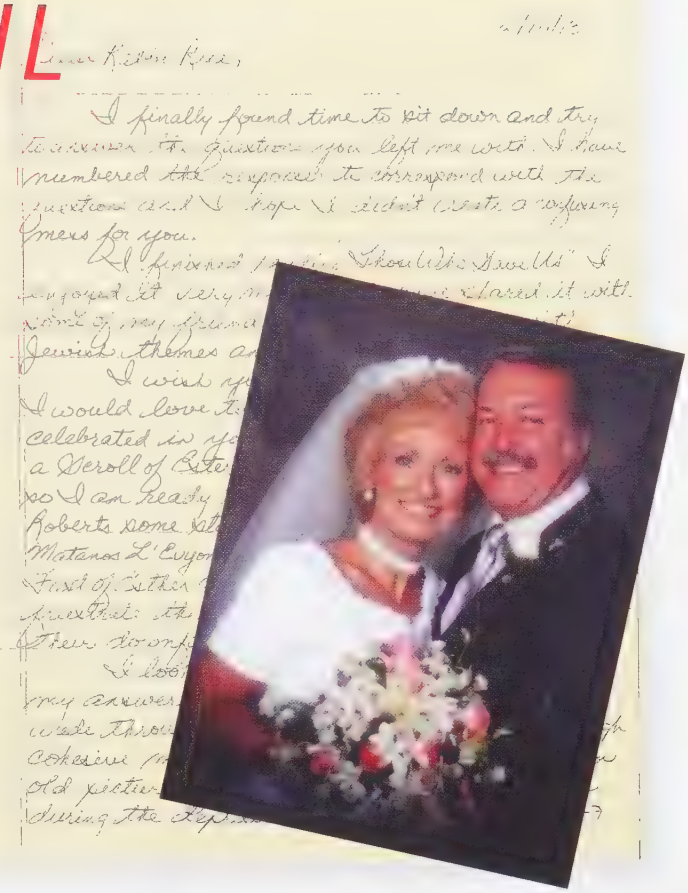
The prison provides only the bare necessities for each inmate: food, bedding, and basic clothes. Many inmates take jobs on the inside to earn money. Linda works with the education program so she has a desk and "office space" which grants her extra room to keep her things, like the books I send and the other Jewish materials she receives from Aleph and Chabad. This job that Linda works at most days pays practically nothing, a few dollars a day at most. But those dollars are sacred for Linda; they afford her simple purchases through the prison store, everyday items that many of us on the outside take for granted, such as shoes or toiletries.

After registering with the security officer by the front door and sending my bags through a scanner, I was instructed to walk through four cell doors down a long hallway. The smell of lunch from the prison common room grew stronger as I made this long trek. I would not be meeting Linda in the visitation room. I would be entering the heart of the prison, where most visitors never walk. Our visit was special, as it had been arranged by the chaplain. I found myself standing in the main artery of the prison. There were no prisoners visible—they were being counted, their final count after lunch. I stood there for what felt like an eternity before one of the many guards noticed me and pointed me to the chapel.

The chaplain greeted me and arranged a table for Linda and me to sit and visit. When we first met in person, in the middle of the prison chapel, we embraced and took a moment to simply see each other after so many letters back and forth. And then we began to talk. We spoke about Linda's Judaism, her background, the support she has received from Jewish organizations while incarcerated. I have learned that most liberal rabbis are not eager to visit inmates, that this is mostly the work of Chabad and the Orthodox. I do not judge. It took me a full decade after receiving my ordination before I chose to reach out into the prison world. I think we rabbis have a great deal of fear surrounding what such a connection means for us. I know that when I went to visit Linda, I was both nervous and intrigued about what it would be like to enter the prison.

Linda and I talked about how she arrived at the place she is today, a Jewish woman destined to serve over 20 years behind bars.

IN PRISON SOIL



One of the letters Linda Whitaker sent to Rabbi Laurie Rice this winter. Linda and James Whitaker (her 4th husband) on their wedding day, in August 2000.

We spoke about the challenge of maintaining one's humanity, much less one's Judaism, within the confines of prison. She then wrote out by hand her thoughts in response to some of my questions.

RABBI LAURIE RICE: Linda, tell me about your family background and what your life was like prior to your incarceration. How did you come to live in Tennessee? And how did you come to be incarcerated? What happened?

LINDA WHITAKER: My bubbe, Dora Glinski, was born in Romania and my zeide, Samuel Josephs, was born in Russia. I don't know what year/years they came to America, and I don't know if they met here or in Europe before immigrating. My mother, Sarah, was born in this country in 1924 and I was born here in 1953. My father was not Jewish and my mother always played down the fact that she was Jewish. As a result, I was not raised in a religious home, even though I was raised in an ethnically Jewish neighborhood in Queens, NY. I regret that when I was younger I didn't ask my grandmother for details about her life in Romania and her experiences coming to America. My grandfather abandoned Dora and her four children during the depression, so I never met him. My grandmother was a very strong woman who struggled alone to keep her family intact during hard economic times and without her husband present to help. Sadly, when my grandmother was in her 80's, she had to be placed in a nursing home. Another patient with mental illness problems wandered into her room one evening and bludgeoned her to death with her bedside lamp. When my uncle sued the nursing home, he was awarded $1 for my grandmother's life. The judge told him that was all she was worth because she was no longer capable of generating income. Samuel was never heard from again after he abandoned Dora and the children. They were living in upstate New York at the time and Dora had to place my mother and her siblings in an orphanage while she returned to New York City and set up a place for the children to come to. Eventually, Dora got all four of her children back under the same roof. She never re-married that I know of.

My father was a motorman on the subway in New York City and my mother was a housewife. When I was 10 years old, my father died from lung cancer. My mother was a strict disciplinarian and suffered in silence with severe depression. I believe she was also bipolar because I never knew, at the end of the school day, what mood she would be in when I returned home. I suffered years of abuse at my mother's hands. The abuse was both verbal and physical and it left me with a great deal of suppressed anger and lack of self-esteem. I never got over the loss of my father, who I saw as the "good" parent. As an adult, I married unsuccessfully four times. I think I was always looking for a father figure and did not know how to have a normal marital relationship. Plus, over the years, my unresolved anger issues from my childhood constantly got in the way.

As an adult, I worked as a labor and delivery nurse for over 20 years. Before coming to Tennessee, I lived in Las Vegas for 15 years where I met a man who was a nuclear engineer and worked at a test site right outside of Las Vegas. We dated for a year and married. When the test site closed, he was transferred to Oakridge, TN, so I quit my job and went with him. We divorced after three years, and it was only several years later that I met and married my last husband. We were married for five years. He was emotionally abusive.

I came to prison when I was 53 years old, as the result of a domestic dispute that got way out of hand. My husband was not physically abusive, but was very controlling, and one day, in an argument, something just snapped in me. I am serving a 25-year sentence for second degree murder. Since coming to prison, seven years ago, I have faced my demons and have worked hard to overcome my past failures. For the first time in my life, I started studying the Torah and have connected to my Jewish roots. I now know how to "think Jewish" and through *emuna*, faith, I have developed a much healthier outlook on life. I am blessed with studies, books, and print-outs which are sent to me by the Aleph Institute and by you.

Did you feel Jewish stirrings before your incarceration? And how does it feel to be celebrating Passover, a festival of freedom, when you are behind bars?

Learning Torah concepts and putting them to use in my daily life has given me a lot of much-needed strength. I feel as though I finally know who I am and how I should interact with others. The book *The Garden of Emuna* (by Rabbi Shalom Arush) was life changing for me. Since embracing the belief that every situation we're placed in and every person we encounter is custom designed for us by Hashem, I live a more grateful life. I realize now that I should look at each situation, even difficult ones, as an opportunity to learn and/or make *teshuva* for past misdeeds. I now look for the holiness in everything and when I go out into the prison population everyday I understand that even though I must interact with people and try to make the world a better place, I must also not allow myself to ever forget that I am part of a nation of priests, from whom G-d expects certain things. I truly believe that had I been raised with an openly Jewish, religious background, I would have had the knowledge and skills that would have helped me live a much happier, more successful life.

Yes, Passover is a holiday of freedom. But you see, there are two different kinds of freedom—mental and physical. I still experience a great deal of mental freedom. My mind does not live in here. It's out there. It's on my religious studies and my friends and the people that I write to in the free world. Through my religious studies, I have gained mental freedom. Even though my physical body is in exile, my mind is no longer.

You are an adult embracing your Judaism under constraints. How does living in prison make it difficult to figure out where you fit in Judaism, especially because you're not living in a Jewish community? Do you feel you'd describe yourself as Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox, for example?

Not being able to be active in a Jewish community is one of my greatest regrets. I am the only Jewish woman in this prison at this time and sometimes the sense of isolation is overwhelming. There are Christian services and functions of every denomination but my Jewish services and festivals have to be held alone. Since I decided to give myself the religious education I was denied as a child, I have read materials and explored (in books) the lifestyles of every "type" of Judaism. Rabbi Rice has generously supplied me with reading materials that explore the opinions and daily expressions that come from every facet of Judaism from far left to far right. I have a Jewish pen pal in Germany who is Conservative. She sends me printed materials and shares the way she lives as a Conservative Jewish woman. The Lubavitchers, who founded the Aleph Institute I study with, share the Chassidic outlook on life and have helped me learn how to live a Torah-true lifestyle with strict observance of halakhic law.

At this point, I still can't say where I will "fit" into the Jewish community if I outlive my sentence and live again in the free world. I am still struggling with the concept of living Torah law as it can be applied in the modern time in which we live. How many of the attitudes toward women are "law" and how many were cultural from Biblical times is a subject that I think about frequently. While I would never underestimate the importance of the role a Jewish mother plays in running a "kosher" home, I also think Jewish women should be as valued as men are if they decide their calling in life is outside the home, or as rabbis. I also see nothing wrong with a Jewish woman wearing a tallit while she prays. I probably could live an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle when I get out, but I think it would eventually cause me to feel "suppressed." I think I will fit best in a Jewish community where everyone, no matter their sex or level of observance, is loved by their fellow Jews as they should be.

Left: Linda's grandmother, Dora Glinski Josephs, her mother, Sarah, and her uncle, Sidney, in upstate NY during the Depression.
Right: Christmas 2012, when the Methodist volunteers brought Christmas cheer to the prison. They also brought Linda a bag of Hanukkah gelt as a present.

Having had the experience that you did, and now in prison today, what advice might you offer to other women on the outside, Jewish or non-Jewish?

Knowing what I know now, I would advise girls and women to learn how to set boundaries. Respect yourself, and demand that others do the same. Don't put yourself in the position of depending upon a man to support you. Have a career and consider it as important as your husband's because you never know when you will be on your own. If you find yourself in an abusive relationship, get out as soon as you can. Even if you have to start over, it is better in the long run than risking the situation I and so many other women find ourselves in. Develop a network of good friends and call upon them when you need emotional support. I would also say…help other women in difficult situations. When you do, you will find inner strength that you never knew you had.

Linda, you're the only Jewish woman in this place. How does a Jew live Jewishly when self-determination is suppressed by the prison system? We like to say that Judaism is a verb, but clearly your actions are limited.

Actually, I have not found that living within the restrictive prison system has totally eliminated my ability to reach out and live Judaism as a verb. In recent years I have been an activist for Jewish religious rights with the Tennessee prison system. I reach out to other Jewish inmates through the mail and try to help them feel less isolated. Through our letters, I share studies and Jewish thought with them, and show my love for my fellow Jew by making sure they get to hear their name at mail call so they know someone still cares for them. I also interact with the Christian community here in the prison to do my best in fostering better relations between Christians and Jews. I have shared with the Christian inmates information on Pesach, the seder meal, Holocaust Remembrance Day, and many other topics that help them to understand and have tolerance for another faith other than their own. It's one of the benefits of working in the education system here.

THE PRISON PROVIDES YOU WITH PRISON UNIFORMS, BASIC BEDDING, AND 1800 CALORIES PER DAY. BEYOND THAT, YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN.

So, for example, as part of the social studies lesson for the week, I asked our instructor if I could offer a presentation on Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, as part of the weekly lesson. And every year, the Methodist group that comes to visit us puts on a seder meal. Granted, this seder meal is from a Christian perspective, but I always attend and teach about the Jewish seder and the Jewish views on the scriptural texts. I find them to be very welcoming and appreciative of my contributions. In these ways, even though I'm in prison, I believe I live much more "Jewishly" than I ever did.

It's really wonderful that you feel that way, because celebrating the holidays and keeping many Jewish observances is, in fact, so challenging for you in prison, if not impossible at times. You only recently have been able to receive kosher meals, due in large part to Aleph's advocating on your behalf. What would you say is the most challenging aspect of prison life for you as a Jewish woman?

In my opinion, selfishness, to some degree, is what brought us all to prison. Whether we took drugs, drove drunk, robbed, murdered, abused or neglected children, these are all selfish acts that were committed without regard for the cost to others. Once an already selfish person arrives in prison, they then encounter a situation where people, if they don't receive help from people on the outside, struggle to have more than just the very basic necessities for life. The prison provides you with prison uniforms, basic bedding, and 1800 calories per day. Beyond that, you are on your own. Writing supplies, recreational clothing and shoes, small appliances, medical co-pays, hygiene items, and extra food all have to be purchased by the inmate. Some women get help and many do not. The extent of the need in here can affect an inmate in two different ways. It can bring out the best, or the worst in a person. You can get the attitude that you are "not your sister's keeper" or you can have compassion for someone who is hungry and doesn't have a stamp to write home. Then again, no matter how much you want to help others, inmate-to-inmate transfer of any property is technically illegal and can bring you a write-up if you are caught. Most inmates will do whatever they have to in order to gain favoritism that benefits them, or maybe them and their inner circle of friends. Few and far between are inmates who care about improving the general conditions for everyone. Living within this atmosphere can be a positive experience, though. For someone who genuinely wants to change for the better, it's like holding a mirror up to yourself, seeing how you used to be, and determining to do better. There are also some wonderful, caring, generous volunteers who come into the prisons and give of themselves to help us. These volunteers are always Christian. They provide exercise classes, book clubs, holiday celebrations, and many more programs that let the women know that even though they have made mistakes, they are still loved and valued. By watching these volunteers from the free world, I have seen the importance of offering a hand-up to someone who is as far down as they get. I would encourage more Jewish women to become involved with prison programs that offer inmates a chance to learn and improve before re-entering society.

If you could communicate one thing to Jewish women on the outside, one lesson, one message, what would it be?

While the percentage of the Jewish population that's in American prisons is small, the Jews who are in prison need the help of their fellow Jews in the free world so that they can still feel as though they belong to a community. Maintaining one's Yiddishkeit in prison is a constant struggle. One has to fight with the authorities for kosher meals, time off from work on the mandated festivals and holy days, the ability to keep Shabbat, equal time to use the chapel space where Christian services tend to dominate, etc. These constant battles wear an inmate down, and we need encouragement and support from the Jewish community. If the sum message of Torah is to love your fellow man as you love yourself, then how can anyone believe they are living a Torah-true life when they don't reach out in some small way to their fellow Jews who are in prison? ■

Rabbi Laurie Rice is co-senior rabbi of Congregation Micah in Nashville, Tennessee, where she shares the pulpit with her husband.

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KATHY RUTTENBERG, "GROUNDED," 32" X56.5" X26", CERAMIC, METAL 2009, IMAGE COURTESY OF STUX GALLERY NEW YORK

Plotless

by LORI WALD COMPTON

At the age of 37, I purchased two small parcels of land. I had immediate use for the one; there was no choice. But the other—a similar rectangle of flattened blades of grass—awaits me. Or so I thought.

Years earlier, long before I'd contemplated tiny pieces of real estate, I had married a young man who had made it his mission to make me feel safe. Barry was not like any of the other Jewish guys I'd ever met. He was burly and always dressed in the buttoned-down, blue shirt issued by the gas station where he worked to support his parents. Had it been 20 years later and had he not been afraid of needles, he would have sported a tattoo. For our honeymoon, we took a camping trip to Acadia National Forest in Maine. One night I woke up screaming. Our tent had collapsed on top of me and I was pinned to the ground. Barry thought it was a bear attack and in a frenzy of adrenaline and muscle he unpinned me and ripped a hole in the tent. It was a tree bough. We were unscathed, mostly, and thrilled. The National Park system owed us a new tent.

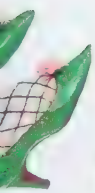
We went on to have an ordinary life and an ordinary marriage: we fought about things like his poker night, who should wash the dishes, and whether it was best to have an odd or even number of children. We decided upon three, took the kids camping in the state forest that offered the kind of nature programs where you get a badge if you finish the hike. We packed a lot of pony rides and playgrounds and beach vacations into just a few years. Mostly, I drove carpools, kept my kids flush with penicillin, and looked for a way to make a law practice fit into my life. Sometimes Barry and I got away, just the two of us. On a getaway to Bermuda, Barry developed a weird cough and night sweats. Even more disturbing, he lost his lucky pirate-coin necklace in the ocean. We figured the cough and night sweats were run-of-the-mill, like bronchitis. When his doctor called and said Barry needed tests immediately, we didn't panic. Barry was only 33. Doctors can be so dramatic.

On the day Barry died, five years later, of non-Hodgkins' lymphoma, my M.D. neighbor sent over Valium and a tray of cold cuts. The funeral director sat in our family room and asked many helpful questions to guide me through the process. I answered "yes," I answered "no." I ordered folding chairs for shiva.

Barry's Orthodox upbringing gave him a healthy disrespect for sanctimony and kosher food, but he was a man of no pretense and so the Jewish traditions of burial, I thought, fit him just fine. I had his body wrapped in a shroud, no restrictive clothing. The coffin and nails were wood. Everything would disintegrate. Ashes and dust.

The man from the funeral home had a respectful, if disembodied, manner. When he asked me, "One plot or two?" he paused for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders. "You can buy two and always sell one later." I didn't think about it long: Jewish funerals happen so quickly. I purchased the real estate and moved on.

It has been nearly 20 years since that purchase, and I was right. Barry's cemetery row filled up and it's good we got the second spot. But something else caught me by surprise: before the passage of a respectable amount of time, I fell in love. By all standards, Joe was the wrong guy. He had two little kids, was nine years younger than I, and had been raised Catholic. But we both had had plenty of heartbreak and we still had plenty of energy. The second time we met he was reading Maimonides.



Now Joe and I have been together so long that the seesaw is about to tip: Soon I will have been married longer to my second husband than to my first.

When I considered remarriage, my rabbi had some advice: "Your new husband will need to love Barry as well as you."

Joe has done this, and more. He has loved my children, and he asks everyone who knew Barry what they loved about him. When he steps into a difficult situation, he assesses what is necessary, then does the right thing. He has even promised I could die first. It's our running joke, since he's so much younger, and it's our way of dealing with the inevitable. Despite our happiness, we've had a real estate problem since the get-go: Where will Joe be buried? The spaces on both sides of my burial plot are already taken.

According to my rabbi, Jews do not say "till death do you part" at their wedding ceremony. Barry died, I married Joe, and there is a blurry line between my first marriage and my second. Barry and Joe have a relationship, too. There's no blood connecting them, but they're linked through me. Now Joe and I have been together so long that the seesaw is about to tip: Soon I will have been married longer to my second husband than I was to my first.

I wish I knew the right thing to do. For a while, we considered buying another plot just across the road. Whoever ended up there would be within spitting distance of the other two. Close, but still set aside. Or we could buy two new plots. I don't want to arrange for my body to be laid next to Joe's, because I worry about not being next to Barry. Nor do I want to leave the plot I already purchased unfilled, because that feels wrong, too.

For Joe and me, the question of plot has become an irresolvable marital dispute, so we've pushed it, as it were, underground. Much of what happens in life is inexplicable; or worse, stupid. We know the beginning, we know the end, but everything in between zigs and zags with no real regard for how we expected things to be. These two little bits of real estate practically in the middle of the country, one with a headstone, the other graniteless, are as permanent and reliable as people and marriages are not.

When my kids were little, they used to make a game of finding the largest rock to place on their father's headstone, which was etched with his name, dates of birth and death, and the words HUSBAND and FATHER. Presumably they'll place rocks on my gravestone, too, after I'm gone, and on Joe's after he dies.

The last time I went to visit Barry's grave, I went with our youngest child, Adam. Adam is the kind of person you want to have around if you're about to pass out on hard concrete after a race, or fall through a glass window at a party. He is decisive and he jumps to the rescue without hesitation.

Adam has pursued a career in real estate so he has insights in matters pertaining to land. He can ask the tough questions. Who is the empty grave for? Where will Dad (Joe) be buried?

"It's a big problem," I said.

I like to think Adam inherited his pragmatism from me, not from either of his fathers. But what he suggested made me wonder: "Maybe I'll be buried here," he said.

"Don't say such a thing," I gasped. I can't bear the idea of my son dying before me.

"Why?" Adam answered, calm and inquisitive.

"Because that means you would die before me."

"No," he said, smiling slyly. "You have no idea where I plan to bury you."

I looked appreciatively at my young man, my child, and the jokey, unflappable way he has learned to negotiate the sometimes painful world, even from the vantage point of the blue granite marker of his father's grave and the indefinitely empty plot of land where we both stood, feet firmly planted. ■

Lori Wald Compton's fiction and non-fiction have been published in both literary and popular media. She devotedly tutors Cleveland public school students in reading competence, and shares her meditation journey at slowbreathsoftheart.com.

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One Hundred Philistine Foreskins

This new novel by **Tova Reich** (Counterpoint, $25) is a shockingly daring and cuttingly brilliant portrait of a fictional Bible scholar known as Ha'Rav Ima Temima Ba'alat Ov of Brooklyn. She is accompanied by her wry prophetess the Kol-Isha-Erva (who lifts her "woman's naked voice"—a literal translation of her name—to record the teachings of Ima Temima), and her priestess the Aish Zara (formerly known as Essie Rapoport, whose "strange fire" burns fiercely by Temima's side and who wears "the tall white mitre of the high priestess with an Urim and Tumim jewel-encrusted breastplate.... ordered on the internet from the Yale University website"). The names of the characters alone attest to Reich's dazzlingly allusive prose style, which frequently echoes, invokes and puns on Biblical verses and classical rabbinic interpretation.

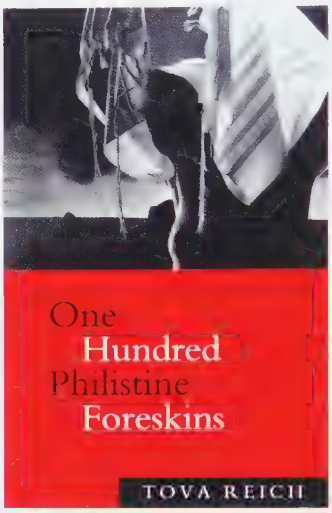
Ima Temima, who grew up as Tema Bavli, daughter of an abusive rabbinical father and a well-intentioned but sickly mother in Boro Park, moved to Jerusalem as a young woman along with the Zionist calligrapher and erstwhile kosher deli waiter Howie Stern of Queens, whom Temima marries solely to escape her father's grasp. Once in Israel, Howie re-invents himself first as the scribe Haim Ba'al Teshuva (a name signifying the new life he finds when he "returns" to Jewish religious tradition) and then as Go'el HaDam, the fanatical "blood avenger" who makes his home in Hebron, violently persecuting "Muslim extremists and latent jihadists....Christian proselytizers, Mormon baptizers of dead Jews, Jews for Jesus, Jewish left-wing intellectuals, homosexuals, Israeli historical revisionists, women rabbis....."

It is this latter category Ima Temima joins when she refuses to join her husband. After a brief stint as one of the many wives of Abba Kadosh, the black cult leader of a patriarchal commune in the Judean Desert, she amasses a group of devoted followers. Ima Temima, who had the privilege of learning Torah as a child by listening in through the walls of a converted outhouse adjacent to a boys' yeshiva, teaches her followers her own radical feminist "mother Torah." Literally, she teaches from a small scroll she wrote herself and which accompanies her even when she is bedridden, "the two wooden rollers of its scroll poking out from the covers like rabbit ears perked up at attention alert to danger."

Reich, like her heroine, is steeped in the cadences of Biblical language. She treats us to (or scandalizes us with) many of Ima Temima's teachings, such as the notion that it was God who impregnated Sarah with Isaac (an ingeniously irreverent parody of the conventions of rabbinic interpretation, whereby one can read the Biblical word "*pakad*" as "*dafak*," which is contemporary Hebrew slang for "knocked up")—which would explain why Abraham was so reluctant to banish Ishmael, and so amenable to sacrificing Isaac. Her political critique, too, could not be more timely—in an era when women are still being arrested for wearing prayer shawls at the Kotel, Reich's novel features a feminist Bible scholar with "friends in high places" parading through the Haredi neighborhoods of Jerusalem trailed by hundreds of devoted followers, herself avoiding the "mosh pit" that is the Western Wall because of the "flabbergasting idolatry of praying to stones."

Then there is the unforgettable moment when Temima, working as part of a Hevra Kadisha to prepare the dead for burial, recognizes the body of her stepmother, a consciously twisted allusion to the gravedigger scene in Hamlet. Reich does not wear her erudition lightly; she does not seem to mind that this book—which is a marvelous read for all—will have a core audience of readers sufficiently learned but not too traditionally minded to appreciate her unique blend of midrash and chutzpah—provided, of course, that they are not too faint of heart.

ILANA KURSHAN



The opening of the novel will give you a sense of what awaits in the pages to follow:

It is a matter of record that certain living creatures, feeling the end of life squeezing them in, make one last desperate attempt to break free and do exactly what they want to do and express themselves exactly as they wish to be understood, on their own terms, without consideration of the desires or pressures or disapproval of family and other enemies, or of any being at all who claims ownership over them.

As she readied herself to carry out such an action, HaRav Temima Ba'alat Ov, the renowned Jerusalem Bible teacher and beloved guru revered as Ima Temima by thousands of disciples, called to mind the case of the most godlike of all mortal creators, the writer Lev Tolstoy, who in a grand final gesture took flight from the unbearable materialism and vulgarity of wife and other hangers-on and bolted from his estate Yasnaya Polyana in search of the purity he preached and needed—yes, he had to have it right now, he could not put it off another minute, this was his last chance, his final statement—only to be reduced by an old man's illness in the once insignificant train station of Astapovo, where he died the ignoble but fitting death of a holy fool.

Tolstoy was a Russian, as everyone knows, but under the same heading of striking out at the last moment in a pure gesture of unrestrained, desperate fidelity to self, as Temima was preparing to make her own radical statement on this order, she also called to mind a German—a German Shepherd to be precise, her gentile neighbor's dog known as Germy from the earli-

"A feminist novel like no other"

Out of Tova Reich's untamed imagination—ferocious, searing, and always on the mark—bursts Temima, a prophetess both majestic and vulnerable, her vision teeming with biblical champions, harlots, and sages, who ascends out of a mundane and hurtful Brooklyn to holy veneration in Jerusalem.

True to its startling title, *One Hundred Philistine Foreskins* is a feminist novel like no other—tumultuous with pageantry and pregnancy, wisdom and farce, tenderness and fanaticism, wild faith and earthy folly. If Thomas Mann, with all his anthropological and scriptural vigor, had chosen, instead of Joseph the dreamer, a woman of similar powers and changes of fortune, he might have created Temima. In giving us a visionary Hebrew hero, Mann missed his chance at an oracular Hebrew heroine. But Tova Reich, herself a daring seer, has not.

→ **CYNTHIA OZICK,** *from the dust jacket.*

est chapter of her life when she was a girl growing up in the ultra-Orthodox Boro Park section of Brooklyn and was known in those days as Tema. Howling raggedly day and night, lunging at the end of his rope inside his wretched cage of a yard due to the surrounding Jews' fear-of-dogs gene, Germy's fur thinned and faded as Tema bore witness year after year until one day, when they both turned twelve and Tema was legally and halakhically considered a woman accountable for her own sins, and Rabbi Manis Schmeltzer, the principal of the girls' school she attended, maneuvered his member into her mouth to her wonderment that such a curious idea could even be contemplated—Germy finally shut up once and for all. Casting off his chains with the recklessness of nothing more to lose, he leaped wildly through the gate, staggered down the alley that separated their two houses straight into the street to keep his appointment with the oncoming truck driven by Itche the junkman, which smashed into him, killing him instantly, leaving nothing but a pulped and liquefied mess.

From dead dogs Temima's thoughts glided seamlessly to her area of universally acknowledged expertise, the Hebrew Bible—Tanakh—with her specialty, its difficult women, problems one and all, coming to rest on one of her dearly beloveds, her pet, the majestic Queen Jezebel—in Hebrew, Izevel, island of garbage, female spam—who, as the very strict prophet Elijah the Tishbite had foretold, was recycled first into dog food and then, in the natural course of bodily processes, into dog shit in the fields of Jezreel. Jezebel was the model to whom Temima now turned as she made her preparations for a public demonstration that would finally bring clarity to all who took note of it. Nothing remained of that proud old queen but a skull picked fleshless, a pair of inedible feet, the palms of her idolatrous hands—leavings that even the dogs had spurned. The bitch got what she deserved—Jezebel, a name translated on the tongue of posterity to harlot, but oh how noble and true to herself she was in her final hour, Temima could only bow her head awestruck. Staring straight into the eye of her doom without a speck of self-deception or self-pity, her murderer already at her door, even so this proud old dowager makes him wait, takes her regal time, applies her eye makeup like war paint slowly and artfully for this last battle, the outline of black kohl punctuating her death mask, she helmets her hair as befits a warrior queen, she arranges herself at the upper story window of her palace as for a royal audience—and from that elevation she talks down to the killer of her sons and her own designated assassin—Traitor! Usurper! Murderer! Her eunuchs arrayed behind her take stock of the situation, consider their options, give the old lady a little push, flick her out the window, skirts flying up to expose the withered queenly jewel box, blue blood splattering all over the walls, the absurd indignity of that tough old carcass splayed on the ground to be mashed under the hooves of her executioner's mount.

Her eyes rimmed with black kohl expertly applied by Cozbi, one of her two full-time personal attendants, the unwholesome glow of her skin calmed with white powder, Temima Ba'alatOv sat at her window that morning in her private chambers on the upper floor of her house in the Bukharim Quarter of Jerusalem, gazing down on the street below. Her richly embroidered white silk yarmulke was pulled low over her nearly hairless skull, her phylacteries box from the morning prayers was still affixed to her forehead, the tefillin straps still wrapped around her slack arm, her great talit draped over the shoulders of her loose white robe. Women at windows were never good news, she reflected, they never came to a happy end, you didn't need the Bible for that insight.

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REVIEWS

The Marriage Trap: Worse Than You'd Think

Marriage and Divorce in the Jewish State by **Susan Weiss** and **Netty C. Gross-Horowitz** (Brandeis University Press, Hadassah-Brandeis Institute Series on Jewish Women, $40) contains many shocking stories about women's attempts to secure a divorce in Israeli rabbinical courts. In perhaps the most harrowing of these, a woman seeking to end her emotionally and physically abusive marriage was relentlessly stalked by her recalcitrant husband during the five-year divorce ordeal. In order to prove to the rabbinical judges presiding over her case that she was promiscuous—and therefore undeserving of any basic rights—her husband hired a private detective to record her every move, including, unbeknownst to her, videotaping her in the privacy of her home. The husband presented to the rabbinical judges a 15-minute video recording of this poor woman walking around in her own home in her underwear, when she thought she was alone. The rabbinical judges, rather than question the cruelty and legality of the husband's actions towards his wife and the violation of her basic right to privacy, decided to watch the entire recording from start to finish. The woman—the only woman in a courtroom full of men—sat there helpless, powerless, mortified and completely objectified, as the rabbis and her husband colluded to reduce her to nothing with their ruthless gaze.

The husband presented to the rabbinical judges a 15-minute video of this poor woman walking around in her own home in her underwear, when she thought she was alone.

Weiss and Gross-Horowitz's important book expertly chronicles the stories of six *agunot*, literally "chained women"—women who wait for years to be released from their unwanted marriages. The authors vividly portray the many problems involved in the divorce process in Israel, in which all divorces of all Jews must go through the state-backed rabbinical court. This unbridled rabbinic power combines with state legal authority to violate some of the most basic rights of Jewish women in Israel. The narratives about women's destroyed lives are interwoven with incisive legal-*halakhic* analysis, Israeli legislative history and political philosophy. The women, who represent a wide spectrum of educational, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds—religious and secular, Ashkenazi and Sephardic, native and immigrant—are all tortured and tormented twice: once by husbands bent on causing them pain, and a second time by a rabbinical court that empowers abusers and completely fails to protect women.

Each story represents a different aspect of the court's astounding dysfunction. One woman's husband failed to appear in court for 10 years, and yet he still had more rights than she did. Another woman was married for all of three months to a man who was widely known to be mentally unstable and perhaps a psychopath, but 15 years later, as she approaches the age of 40, she is still waiting for her *gett*, the Jewish writ of divorce. One woman tried to avoid all this by getting married in Cyprus—but the rabbinical court coopted authority and still demanded that she receive a gett. As the authors unequivocally demonstrate, the rabbinical court regularly and systematically violates women's rights to freedom of conscience, equal treatment, privacy, due process, property, liberty, and even the right to marry, without any regard for the lives that are ruined in the process.

In Israel now, there is no available mechanism for "secular" marriage or divorce, regardless of one's religion. The authors put forth a vision for a different system regarding all issues of "personal status" as they are called. "To put an end to these transgressions, the state-backed Orthodox rabbinic court monopoly must be disbanded and replaced by a rich and vibrant mosaic of voluntary rabbinic courts that will stand alongside a transparent, secular, unified and unabashedly liberal civil system of marriage and divorce that protects the human rights of all citizens," they write.

The authors themselves come from an Orthodox background and are very respectful of the halakhic system. Susan Weiss was the founder of Yad L'Isha, an agunah advocacy organization of Ohr Torah Stone, and also the founder of the Center for Women's Justice, which helps free agunot using tort law, and Netty Gross-Horowitz is a senior writer at The

Jerusalem Report. The authors propose instituting civil marriage and divorce in Israel in order to protect these basic human rights and advocate for a complete separation of religion and state. By turning religious adherence into a matter of choice rather than a force of state coercion, their proposal may have the effect of not only saving countless women's lives, but also saving Judaism from the destructive forces in the form of state-empowered rabbinical judges.

Elana Maryles Sztokman is the executive director of JOFA, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, and author of The Men's Section: Orthodox Jewish Men in an Egalitarian World, *winner of the 2012 National Jewish Book Award for Women's Studies.*

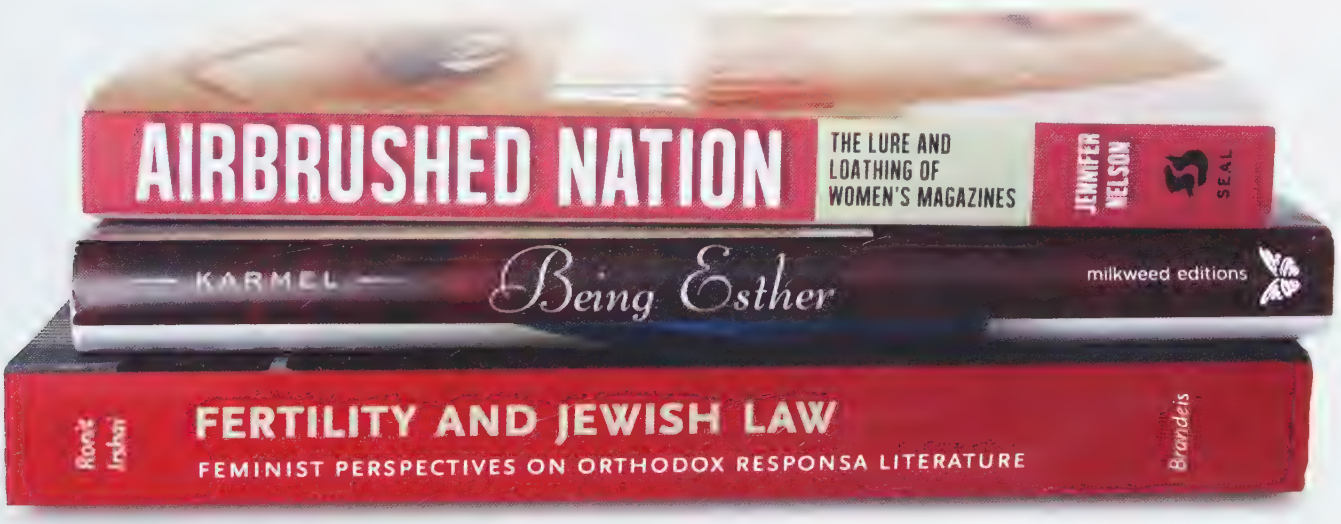
Then: Sex, No Procreation Now: Procreation, No Sex

In the first divine commandment that appears in the Bible, God turns to the newly created human couple, male and female, and directs them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it…" (*Genesis 1:28*). Though the text is explicit that this command is directed "to them," rabbinic Judaism and the legal tradition that it initiated came to understand this imperative to be one that binds men, but not women; women themselves are understood to be exempt from any similar duty to bear children. And yet, of course, woman is crucial to the process by which a man fulfills his religious obligation, and thus women's role in the childbearing process is of intense interest to the Jewish legal tradition. It is that paradox that gives rise to an incisive study by **Ronit Irshai, *Fertility and Jewish Law: Feminist Perspectives on Orthodox Responsa Literature*** (Brandeis University Press, $39.95), which examines how Jewish legal thinkers through history have addressed issues relating to women's decision-making over their childbearing choices.

How do male Jewish legal thinkers address women's decisions about childbearing?

The book is divided into two broad sections, "Sex Without Procreation" (birth-control and abortion) and "Procreation Without Sex" (artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization and surrogacy). Irshai chooses to focus on legal writings coming from Orthodox communities, both "modern" and "haredi" (Ultra-Orthodox), with an emphasis on modern texts. This means that her study is in essence a review of the religious writings of men addressing issues of fundamental importance to women's physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional well-being, but women themselves are not participants in the discussions, a point of which Irshai is highly conscious: "Jewish law (halakhah) is the product of an exclusively male preserve. Though it governs the lives of men and women alike, it has been formulated and interpreted, for thousands of years, by an all-male scholarly elite."

As the author demonstrates, the broad trends in Orthodox legal thinking in these two areas seem to go in opposite directions—strict limitations or outright prohibitions on means of preventing or ending pregnancy, versus a cautious but ultimately accepting approach towards the use of scientific means to fertilize and



gestate a fetus. But Irshai probes into the legal decisors' moves and maneuverings, selective readings and omissions so as to reveal aspects of a common gender ideology that links them: the ideology of pronatalism. Compare, for example, the positions taken by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, one of the most prominent Orthodox decisors of the 20th century, in the following areas: ...the authorization [to abort a fetus] extends only to saving its mother from dying while giving birth and not to any of the mother's other needs; that is obviously forbidden.

"[Artifical insemination] should be permitted with use of sperm from a gentile, for since the offspring will be a Jew because its mother is Jewish, there are no concerns of any sort... with the husband's consent, and where they are suffering greatly, it should be permitted..."

Much of Irshai's task is to walk the reader through the sources relevant to the topics at hand, from their origins in classical rabbinic literature of late antiquity (such as the Mishnah and Babylonian Talmud) through medieval commentary, responsa and codes, and into the writings of widely recognized Orthodox authorities of the 20th century. Irshai is well versed in the details and intricacies of these legal readings, and while the material may be more difficult for readers without this textual and legal training, Irshai is a clear and lucid guide, highlighting the crucial points and turns of logic —or twisting of earlier sources—out of which legal rulings are built.

Ultimately, Irshai's aim is to use methods of critical feminist theory "to tell *a different halakhic story*, one that accounts for the female narrative and its missing perspective." As she observes, it is not enough to attempt to determine if the outcome of a legal ruling is "good" or "bad" for women: "We have seen that even when the halakhic conclusion of a given responsum could be considered respectful of women and properly sensitive to their interests, the rhetoric of that responsum sometimes points in the opposite direction." Whatever the legal outcomes may be, she notes, "a substantial number of contemporary halakhic rulings in fact fail to treat the women in question as subjects, as ends in their own right; instead they define women's value as people primarily through their reproductive function." She demonstrates again and again that many of the conclusions reached by recent decisors are not the inevitable outcome of their source materials. She ends, however, on a hopeful note, one that stresses the importance of this work and others like it, particularly for "women who feel committed to halakhic discourse but also to the values of equality." "The new 'halakhic story' they are creating affords the women of this generation the possibility of a considerable degree of liberation and opens the door to future change as well." May it indeed be so.

GAIL LABOVITZ, *a Conservative rabbi and associate professor of rabbinic literature at the American Jewish University, is the author of* Marriage and Metaphor: Constructions of Gender in Rabbinic Literature.

Love/Hate Those Trashy Women's Magazines?

Jennifer Nelson, author of ***Airbrushed Nation: The Lure & Loathing of Women's Magazines*** (Seal, $16) and a veteran writer for women's magazines, is deeply conflicted about her subject. From one passage to the next, Nelson flips back and forth between being critical of, and sort of sycophantically lauding, the magazine industry she surveys.

For teens and college freshmen who look at the airbrushed images and wonder how they measure up.

Nelson has armed herself with plentiful research to back up her criticisms of these magazines for promoting unrealistic standards of beauty and thinness; inadequately representing ethnic women (come to think of it, other than Natalie Portman and Rachel Weisz, how many Jewish women regularly grace magazine covers?); sensationalizing health issues and crime stories into breathless, must-read "concern porn"; promising way more on the covers than we'll ever find inside; playing to, and amplifying, women's insecurities; and yes, airbrushing every aspect of what they cover, visually and editorially. She cites reputable studies about everything from models being underweight—according to a 2008 Italian study, 54.5 percent of fashion models had a Body Mass Index (BMI) of under 18, an indication of probable eating disorder—to scented ads increasing readership by 136 percent°, according to a Roper Starch survey. She presents these in the body of the book, as well as in little side boxes labeled "Glossy Fact." She strews other boxes around the book, too, some labeled "Readers Respond," with quotes from women, and "Insider Input," with comments from writers and editors. It's awfully...magazine-like.

And then she seems to suck up to the industry she's exposing – and from which she still makes a good deal of her living, whether writing for magazines herself, or teaching aspiring magazine writers in a MediaBistro online course entitled "Stiletto Boot Camp." Passages like this one stand out (and irk): "At their best, women's magazines are a space to be comforted, entertained and advised, a place that is fun to visit. Women's glossies shine a light on us, and some may argue they dare to reveal our ideals, struggles, hopes and dreams so that we can enrich our lives."

While Nelson has a great deal of magazine history covered, she makes very

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little of the advent of Ms. Magazine—at one point lumping it in with the glossies, and never mentioning that some time in the 1990s, Ms. stopped accepting advertisements because its editors recognized the inherent conflicts in journalism being funded by advertisers. She also devotes only three paragraphs to Jane Pratt, the founding editor of the irreverent, groundbreaking Sassy, Jane, and now xojane.com. There is no mention of feminist magazines like BUST or Bitch. And while she occasionally cites comments that appeared on Jezebel.com, Nelson overlooks that Gawker.com, launched in 2007 as an antidote to women's magazines, and made huge waves by calling attention to the ways in which magazines digitally manipulated cover photos of celebrities. There are also no references to TheHairpin.com, another irreverent women's magazine alternative, owned by Awl Media.

As I was reading *Airbrushed*, I tried to imagine who Nelson imagined her audience to be. Did she mean for this to be a behind-the-scenes guide for her Stiletto Boot Camp students? A textbook for women's studies students? For journalism majors?

Despite its shortcomings, *Airbrushed* does generally cast a jaundiced eye on the often disempowering women's magazine industry, and it does so in a well-defended, scholarly way (despite its perky-women's magazine tone). It could serve as a good introductory peek behind the glossy covers for younger women—teens and college freshman—who are just beginning to look at the airbrushed images and wonder how they measure up.

SARI BOTTON *is a writer and editor who has written for more retrograde women's magazines than she'd care to admit.*

Surviving Old Age

Old age is no place for sissies, the familiar adage goes. But Esther Glass Lustig, the 85-year-old widowed protagonist of the deeply moving debut novel ***Being Esther*** (Milkweed Editions, $22), by **Miriam Karmel**, is anything but timid.

Determined to remain in her own apartment in a familiar, if deteriorating Chicago neighborhood, Esther wages a fierce war against her well-intentioned but overbearing daughter, hell-bent on moving her into an assisted living community—"Bingoland," as Esther disdainfully describes it. Convinced that "people die when they give up their car keys," she fights both her daughter and her doctor to hold on to her driving rights. And in a patronizing world that mistakes old age for dotage, she battles mightily for her dignity.

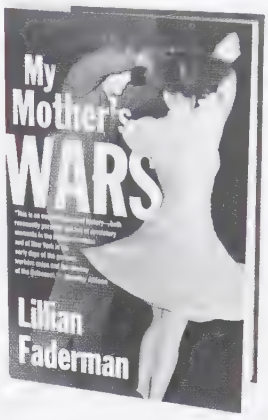
Esther refuses to give in or up. Twice a year she tries on her favorite blue dress, the one she bought during her "svelte" phase and plans to be buried in, to make sure it still fits. She even has it hemmed to accommodate her shrinking body, though she knows no one will see it. Esther has her standards.

The only enemy Esther cannot outsmart is time. Her doctor refers to the extreme arthritis that has turned her hand into an inoperative claw—one of a series of accelerating physical deteriorations—as a "swan's neck," but, she quips to one of her few friends still living, the condition sounds a lot prettier than it looks.

When Esther isn't visiting an old friend imprisoned in Alzheimer's and Bingoland, intentionally ramming her shopping cart into a noisy, cell-phone-talking narcissist in the local supermarket, or taking her daughter on a jaunt to Mexico (then leaving her holding the bottle of Johnny Walker Black on their way through customs), she is circling the terrain of her past, going deeper every time.

She remembers her mother, whose expression of love was that familiar immigrant cry, "Go hit your head against the wall." She recalls her discovery of books, those magic vessels that transported her from a confined, close-knit Midwestern Jewish world to exotic universes where women drank in the afternoon and talked tough to their husbands. She summons her own spouse of more than half a century, sometimes aching for him with love and sexual longing, sometimes viewing

LOVE, WAR, and LIFE in the SHADOW of the HOLOCAUST



"Tells the aching story of immigrant factory workers in the decades preceding World War II—sad lives made sadder by the terrified knowledge that their families in Europe are being extinguished. **The book is part memoir, part reconstruction . . . and all artistry**."

—**EDITH PEARLMAN**, author of *Binocular Vision*

"**Lillian Faderman is an extraordinary storyteller**, one of the few who can tell a painful story with a complex ending—and imbue it with humor, sensuality, and earthy grace, in every sentence."

—**AMY BLOOM**, author of *Away*

"**This book is a work of originality, written with such imaginative sympathy** that I read it with unabating pleasure from beginning to end."

—**VIVIAN GORNICK**, author of *Fierce Attachments*

"The sympathy and understanding Faderman shows for her immigrant mother and her whole family reminded me again of what I love about memoir. **This is not just a story; these are lives on the page**."

—**DOROTHY ALLISON**, author of *Bastard Out of Carolina*

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him with a gimlet eye. Marty's watch with the expandable strap, which she wears because she can no longer fasten clasps or buckles, is like him, "annoying, yet dependable." She remembers the heartache of the years her daughter fled to a Vermont commune and sent back her mother's letters unopened. And she revisits the friends and neighbors she flirted with and occasionally fell for.

When Esther reads an obituary of a woman who was described as ordinary, she fears the same can be said of her. But Karmel's subtle, psychologically acute rendering of Esther's life reveals a woman who has lived fully, if not flamboyantly; loved deeply; and kept her dignity, irrepressible wit, and essential humanity. *Being Esther* is a spare book with cosmic implications and a huge heart.

Goldie Rubin Feld Rosenthal, the grandmother in ***The Secret of the Nightingale Palace*** by **Dana Sachs** (William Morrow, $14.99), is just as resilient, but as seen through the eyes of her 35-year-old, recently widowed granddaughter Anna, she's not nearly so winning as Esther. Goldie stopped speaking to her granddaughter five years earlier when Anna married a man Goldie predicted would never amount to much. But now Anna's husband is dead, and Goldie calls out of the blue with the suggestion that Anna drive the two of them from New York to San Francisco in Goldie's vintage Rolls Royce to deliver a collection of valuable Japanese art, which Goldie acquired by mysterious means when her Japanese friends were shipped off to an internment camp during World War II.

In California, interactions even between Jews were greatly influenced by anti-Semitism.

Anna's initial instinct is to refuse. Her grandmother is hypercritical of others and devoted to her own comfort, such as four-star restaurants where she tells everyone what to order, and luxurious hotels, neither of which she's likely to find on Route 66. But for reasons she doesn't fully understand, Anna agrees. What ensues is a quirky buddy trip that survives generational warfare, pent-up family resentment, a surprisingly fortuitous hospital stay, and a secret kept for more than half a century that gets Anna back on her feet, all the impossible, headstrong Goldie wanted in the first place.

ELLEN FELDMAN *is the author, most recently, of* Next To Love. *Her new novel,* The Unwitting, *will be published this year.*

California's Jewish Girls

Scientists now tell us that people underestimate how much they will change in the future. Looking back over our lives, we recognize the dramatic shifts that have occurred—the "different people" that we were at age 10, age 22, and age 35. But looking forward, we tend to expect more of the same, forgetting all of the evidence to the contrary.

We don't see this kind of change in Elaine Greenstein, the main character of ***The Tin Horse*** by **Janice Steinberg** (Random House, $12.99). Although we follow Elaine from her 1920's girlhood in the Los Angeles Jewish neighborhood of

Boyle Heights through her eighth decade, she seems to have become exactly who she set out to be, without any of life's realistic detours and surprises. At the start, she is a bookish, argumentative girl and—staying in character—she becomes a lawyer and a "feisty octogenarian" in modern-day Los Angeles. As a girl, Elaine, always skittish about sexual adventures, looks down on the sordid L.A. nightlife that attracts her twin sister, Barbara, who runs away from the girls' tight-knit Jewish world. The sisters' late-in-life reunion forms the crux of the novel.

Steinberg's story travels back and forth between present-day Los Angeles and the girls' childhood, offering glimpses of Elaine and Barbara's different experiences of the same family. If the novel feels old-fashioned, it is not because we're focused on two eighty-year-old women. In fact, in the midst of our current obsession with writing frankly about the indignities of aging and our bad feelings about our necks and waistlines, Steinberg offers a refreshingly vital look at her older characters. The novel is realistic enough to include some of the aches and pains that come with this stage of life, but there are new possibilities in her characters' lives for relationships precisely because their responsibilities and commitments have changed.

What will feel old-fashioned is the mode of Jewishness described. Instead of the ambivalence, apathy or struggle that characterizes so many characters in contemporary "Jewish novels," *The Tin Horse* offers straight-up 1930's style Jewish self-hatred: Elaine's twin sister Barbara refuses to be trapped within the confines of a 1930's Jewish life, and so she remakes herself as a non-Jew in order to expand her horizons.

Jews who try to pass in this way have largely dropped out of the repertoire of American Jewish novelists, but Steinberg reminds readers of the changes in Jewish experience for those whose lifetime spanned much of the twentieth century. Interactions even between Jews were greatly influenced by anti-Semitism, Steinberg shows, as her Jewish characters size up each new Jew with an eye to how the other will be perceived by the non-Jewish majority. When a relative from Romania comes to live with the family in the 1930's, Elaine and Barbara can barely conceal their disdain for the furtive, Yiddish-speaking boy who seems nothing like their California classmates. Later in life, Elaine reflects, "I knew that the qualities in Ivan that made Barbara's skin crawl— and which, I admit, I found distasteful—were survival skills that came from his being born in a rotten place at a horrific time."

What change we do find in *The Tin Horse* is in the characters' growing comfort with Jewishness. As the sisters look back on their unease in their younger Jewish skins, they realize what different people they were. The reader, at least, feels some excitement for the new lives that await them.

RACHEL GORDAN *is a postdoctoral fellow in American Judaism at Northwestern University.*

Rather than uniting Jesse and Ramon, the quest for a child seems to drive them apart.

Open and Shut Adoption

Desperate to have a child, the narrator of ***The Mothers*** (Scribner, $26), the third novel by **Jennifer Gilmore**, is in her late thirties and unable to conceive because of an operation that left serious scar tissue. Jesse Weintraub and her husband, Ramon, have instead turned down the fraught path of open adoption. As Jesse attempts to deal with Byzantine agencies, unpredictable birth mothers and the wild surges of her own heart, she ponders the seemingly simple question: what is a mother?

Jesse hopes that Ramon, with his Spanish-Italian heritage, will be able to offer a child his "seventeen languages and countless rich cultural experiences." But because she is an assimilated Jew, she's less clear about her own contribution: "My child will be heir to what?" She recalls the rituals of her childhood, like the seder at which "all the cousins, rushing to find the afikomen as if it held the key to something besides Nana Sadie's checkbook... Three generations dipping our fingers into the salted water...singing Dayenu as if our lives depended on it, my grandfather, the attorney, bent and bird like, his wife, three times larger than he, belting it out, even Great Aunt Sylvia, who was deaf, sang in her low, sad voice."

At first, Jesse hopes for a Russian child; as the descendant of Eastern European Jews, this makes a kind of emotional sense to her. Later she and Ramon grapple with whether they could accept a child whose mother may have used drugs, or one with mental challenges or physical deformities. Her search leads her back to her family of origin and she is forced to deal with issues in her own childhood—a mother who left often and for long periods because of her work—and her younger sister, from whom she has been estranged and who now turns up at their parents' home pregnant.

Through Jesse's eyes, we see the difficult side of the open adoption process, wherein the identity of the parents and the birth mother are known to one another. Rather than uniting Jesse and Ramon, the quest for a child seems to drive them apart. They bicker, they fight, and they turn away from one another, toward others for solace. Jesse shares a brief, unexpected kiss in a parking lot with a lesbian she meets on the adoption trail; she never even tells Ramon about it. But somehow they muddle on.

Gilmore has written, in a very public way, about her own struggles with open adoption, and in this novel, she has tackled a subject that is both painful and all too familiar to her. She carries it off with poise and grace.

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH *is Lilith's fiction editor. Her fourth novel,* A Wedding

in Great Neck, *appeared in 2012, and the forthcoming novel* Two of a Kind *will be out in September.*

A Novel of Bus Bombings and Russian Émigrés

How does trauma change our lives forever? ***The Wanting*** (Pantheon, $25.95), the second novel by **Michael Lavigne**, explodes into print with a terrorist bombing in Tel Aviv and never looks back. With three interlocking narratives written in lyrical prose, this stunning and disquieting novel follows the rippling effects of this act of violence through the lives of its victims and perpetrators.

Roman Guttman is a Russian émigré living in Tel Aviv in 1996, an architect and the single parent of a quirky and self-possessed daughter. When a suicide bomb blast rips through his office wall, it transforms him both physically and mentally; his hallucinatory visions of the bomber spur his wandering through the Palestinian Territories, in search of the conflict's roots. Entwined with Roman's story is the narrative of Fadi, the bomber speaking from beyond the grave, telling meandering vignettes that recount how he came to terrorism. Lavigne is skillful at making both voices sympathetic, the unhinged victim and the boy terrorist, and their tales interact as the narrative progresses.

The third plotline is voiced by Anyusha (Anna), Roman's teenaged daughter who embarks on her own treacherous quest into the world of radical Jewish fundamentalism. With spiky hair and a love of Japanese manga comics, Anyusha invigorates the novel with her youthful energy. "As soon as he took my hand, everything got quiet. The voices of the trees and the insects, and the cars and the people in them, and the buildings and the pavement.... It was like coming up from under water when you're holding your breath, and you don't think you're going to make it, but you do, you get to the end of the pool and you burst through the water." The narrative gains energy as the plotlines converge: Roman near Bethlehem, Anyusha in the Old City of Jerusalem, Fadi's spirit floating through the ether.

When a suicide bomb blast rips through his office wall, it transforms him both physically and mentally.

In parallel to Anyusha's adventure, Roman recalls the story of Anyusha's *refusnik* mother Collette and her trials in the Soviet Union a decade earlier. Reading this novel a quarter-century after the historic March on Washington for Soviet Jewry, I am reminded of the difficulties refusniks faced in the Soviet Union—the shortages, the persecutions, the trumped-up trials—and of the ways in which their struggle still impacts the Russians now living in Israel. At the same time, Anyusha is a perfect example of the modern second-generation Russian Israeli: curious about her parents' struggles in Soviet Russia, but thoroughly Israeli and engaged with the problems of her society and time.

While there are many novels about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, what makes *The Wanting* stand out is its captivating writing. Fadi's voice, in particular, haunts me with its poetry, and from his story does the book's title come. "I am certain that what I felt that day, I also feel today: a wanting. A wanting for something I have never tasted, but without which life cannot be said to have been properly lived." The yearning for this deeper experience is what drives the characters in this captivating novel.

SARA N. S. MEIROWITZ *is a writer, editor, and Jewish educator in her final year of rabbinical studies at Hebrew College in Boston. She is a fearless rider of Jerusalem buses.*

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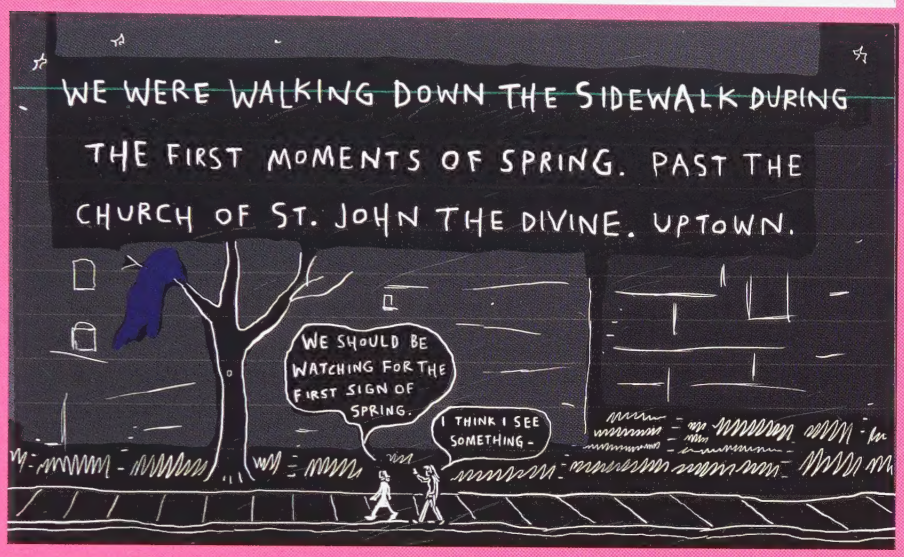
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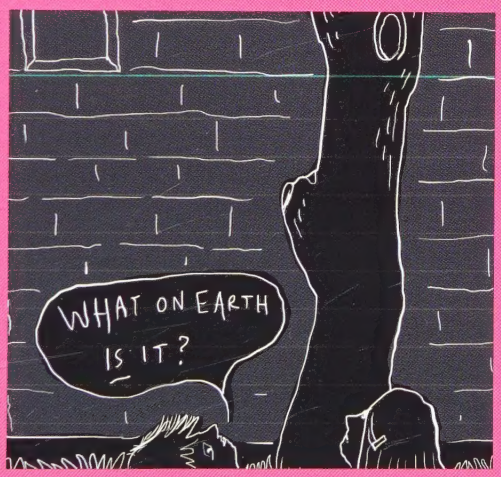
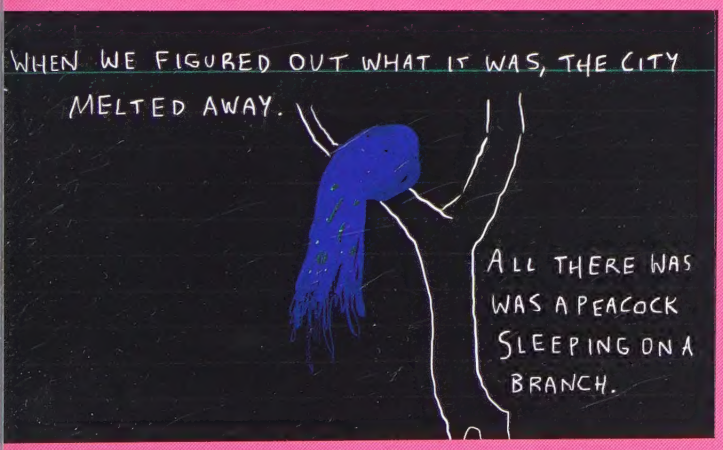
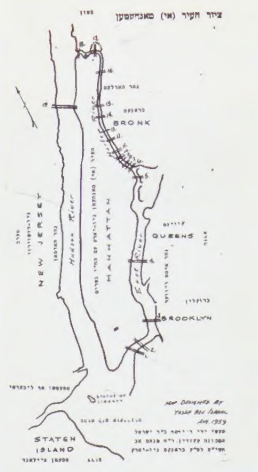




"Overheard in New York" is a Liana Finck series on the Lilith blog. Her graphic novel, A Bintel Brief, *will be out later this year.*

HAPPENING



Eruv rope beside Lincoln Square Synaogue in Manhattan, New York, 2012, private collection. Manhattan eruv map, 1959.

It's a Thin Line

The *eruv*, an often-controversial Biblical precept, divides private and public, sacred and secular, the Sabbath from the everyday. Usually a wire or thread strung around a traditional community, its existence enables people to wheel a stroller on shabbat, for example. A diverse range of objects in a new exhibit, "The Eruv and Jewish Community in New York and Beyond," at the Yeshiva University Museum in Manhattan includes early printed Hebrew books, century-old images of New York life, contemporary tools, and works by contemporary artists. Through June 30, 2013. *yumuseum.org*

Gathering the Fragments

A guest book from a Jewish hotel in Rome, dating from 1937–1941, found in a trash bin on a Tel Aviv street, has become part of a national campaign in Israel to salvage privately held Holocaust-related items and reconstruct the stories behind them. Yad Vashem, the Jerusalem museum and archive asks the public to search their houses for every document, photograph or object from the years before the war, during the Holocaust, in the DP camps and in the immediate post-War period. Items submitted together with the stories behind them have an important role in preserving memory for future generations. Yad Vashem will make these objects accessible to educators and the public. *collect@yadvashem.org*

One in Three

One in three women will have an abortion in her lifetime. See the complexities of women's lives and the important role that abortion access has had through the generations in 40 stories, selected from hundreds submitted, in a campaign marking the 40th anniversary of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision. The compilation of memoirs is available in paperback and e-book. You can share your story on the website as well. *1in3Campaign.org*

The Devil's Bride

Women klezmer musicians occasionally performed publicly at fairs throughout Central Europe in the 17th and early 18th centuries, according to Yale Strom, the ethnographer and klezmer artist who created the musical score for the 2011 audio drama "The Witches of Lublin." The 11 songs on this CD are typical of a Jewish wedding in 18th century Poland. Each is introduced by Strom and actress Miriam Margolyes. The songs are performed in the klezmer style featuring violin, cimbalom (hammered dulcimer), bass, and accordion, with vocal improvisation by Elizabeth Schwartz. *yalestrom.com/music.php*

Jewish Fiction's All-Women Issue

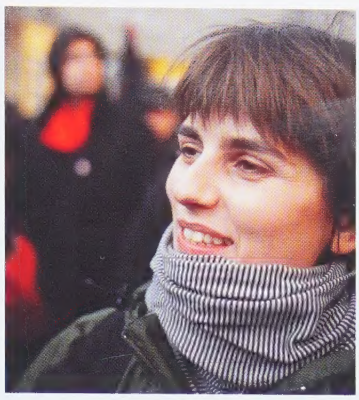
Read stories originally in Yiddish, Spanish, Hebrew, and English. Read Sheindl Franzus-Garfinkle, Ana Maria Shua, Miri Varon, Yael Medini, Hadara Lazar, Erika Dreifus, Robin Roger, Yael Unterman, Dalia Rosenfeld, Gail Benick and more, in Issue 9 of the online journal described by its editor Nora Gold as a "virtual home for Jewish fiction from around the world." *JewishFiction.net*

Women Talk About Segregation in Israel

"Freedom riders" insuring that illegal gender segregation on buses does not occur, and women who encountered restricted participation as women at the funerals of loved ones, are among the 13 women who write about discrimination in the public sphere in this booklet from the Israel Religious Action Center. *irac.org.il*

A Guide to Jewish Prayer and Practices

A paperback guide by Andrea Lieber explains the what and the why of Jewish religious practices, whether in a communal synagogue setting or during seemingly mundane daily tasks like mealtime blessings or visiting the sick. It's for those—more and less—familiar with how to "do Jewish." *penguin.com.au/products/9781615641383/essential-guide-jewish-prayer-practices*



From left: Katka, Maria, Kasia and Tusia.

Discovering You're Jewish—in Poland Today

Four young women who were raised Catholic and discover in their teens that they were born Jewish have their lives charted by documentarian Adam Zucker in a film-in-progress, "The Return." Kasia, 24, a feminist and Ph.D. candidate in Women's Studies, is determined to be a secular Jew and longs for community. Tusia, 30, lives both in Warsaw, where she works to "save" the crumbling remnants of Jewish history, and in Brooklyn, where she feels liberated from "social responsibility" and "hardly Jewish at all." Katka is a brilliant 23-year-old from Slovakia who moved to Warsaw and has begun conversion to Orthodox Judaism. Maria—24, the single mother of a two-year-old—last year met David—a shy, observant Jew—and within two weeks they were engaged. She has to adjust to life as an Orthodox wife, and to face David's desire to emigrate to Israel. These women all face common challenges, including figuring out how their identities can be informed by the Holocaust without being overwhelmed by it.
longnookpictures.com/thereturnfilm

Nalaga'at (Please Touch)

Eleven deaf-blind Israeli actors recently took New York audiences on a magical tour of their inner worlds: the worlds of darkness, silence, and bread which was kneaded, raised, baked on stage, and shared with the audience. "Not by Bread Alone [can a person live]"—the actors declare, sometimes in their own voices and sometimes through sign language interpreters. The words emphasize their need for relationships, as crucial to us all as sustenance. This play is the second production of Nalaga'at Theater, home to the Deaf-Blind Acting Ensemble. If you missed their U.S. tour, you can catch them in Jaffa, Israel. Their cultural, entertainment and training center, founded and directed by Adina Tal, is a meeting place for deaf, blind and deaf-blind people and for any visitors to the Kapish Café where they are served by deaf waiters, the BlackOut restaurant where they are served by blind waiters, as well as a variety of workshops and training programs. *nalagaat.org.il*

The Jewish Foundation for Education of Women

In 1880, Minnie Louis founded the Louis Down-Town Sabbath School to offer formal instruction, promote self-care and hygiene, self-respect and ambition, and distribute refreshments and clothing to the daughters of New York's poor Jewish families. This evolved into a nonsectarian organization that now helps needy women of all groups with scholarships and opportunities for professional development. *jfew.org*

The Feminine Mystique

In anticipation of an alumnae reunion, Betty Friedan sent her Smith College classmates the questionnaire that inspired her trailblazing book which, 50 years ago, triggered the modern feminist movement. At the time, the average American female married in her teens, and the majority of female students dropped out of college to marry—or to prevent themselves from becoming unmarriageable. *The Feminine Mystique* captured the frustrations and thwarted desires of a generation and showed women how they could reclaim their lives. Now there are two new editions: *The Feminine Mystique: Betty Friedan 50 Years* with introduction by Gail Collins and afterword by Anna Quindlen, and the *Norton Critical Edition of Betty Friedan's Feminine Mystique* edited by Kirsten Fermaglich and Lisa M. Fine.

A Project for People of the Book?

Builders, artists, stewards, book donors, borrowers, neighbors and friends are all welcome to support/host/participate in a project promoting literacy and community connections. Originated in Wisconsin in 2009 by Todd Bol and Rick Brooks, the "Little Free Libraries" each house a shelf of books free for the taking. Host one on your lawn? Or maybe your synagogue? Or donate. *Littlefreelibrary.org*

—compiled by Naomi Danis
For events and projects taking place between issues of Lilith, follow Lilith on Facebook and Twitter, check out Lilith.org, and sign up for Lilith's free e-mail newsletter. Send ideas for this section to info@Lilith.org.

NON-MOTHERHOOD-*by*-CHOICE

by DIANE BALSER

AS A JEWISH WOMAN WHO HAS CHOSEN not to have children, how do I make sense of my life in the context of Judaism's first commandment—God enjoining Eve and Adam, in Genesis 1:28, to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill Earth"?

I was raised in a religious home in the 1940s and '50s, but I don't remember either of my parents pressuring me to be a mother when I grew up. Still, isn't that what Jewish females do? We grow up, get married, and then multiply.

By early adulthood, I had left religious practice behind, believing, as a feminist, that a secular life would give me access to a lot more freedom. One day in the mid-1970s, I bought myself the iconic t-shirt of the era, the Roy Lichtenstein cartoon of a distraught woman with hot-red lips and the text bubble, "I can't believe it. I forgot to have children." I wore the tee as a joke until I realized it wasn't. I needed a plan. Would I be fruitful and multiply, or not?

I started an inventory of my girlfriends in the women's liberation movement. Some had chosen single motherhood, some were helping their married friends raise their children, some, mostly lesbians, were choosing motherhood via artificial insemination. Some were going the conventional route, as had most of our parents. There were definitely options. I didn't want to "forget" to have children, though. I wanted to make an informed, solid decision.

For two years, I systematically interviewed women older than myself. I was surprised to find a lot of them who had chosen not to mother (unlike in my mom's generation). They were happy with their decisions; they found their lives rich and interesting. This surprised me, as I had assumed (and was often told) that you couldn't live a gratifying life if you didn't include motherhood. I agonized for months, and then, not without ambivalence, decided not to have kids. I liked young people a lot—indeed, I teach them as a college professor—but I didn't want primary parenting to be one of my life's major commitments.

FOUR OR FIVE YEARS AFTER MENOPAUSE, I went with a friend to see a film about a woman going to the mikveh for the last time. Through half the film, the woman has ongoing conversations with her adult daughter, but then it becomes clear that the daughter is a figment of her imagination. She's the daughter the woman wished she had had, but never did. I sobbed, then went home and went to sleep.

The next morning, I discovered that I was menstruating. Imagine my shock. For two days, even though I was then a *farbrente* secular Jew, I thought that God had miraculously given me one last chance—to both enjoy the potential power that women have to reproduce, and to make sure that I had really, really made the right choice. The third day of bleeding was like my personal Rosh HaShanah. The book was sealed, but I was the one who had sealed it.

I didn't want to "forget" to have children. I wanted to make an informed, solid decision.

Some time after that, I started to participate again in synagogue life. I went back to Jewish texts, wanting to know if my decision was in opposition to Jewish custom and law. The obligation to procreate, I discovered, is upon men, not women. Judaism strongly values women's health, and in earlier times many women died in childbirth. I also found women in Jewish texts who didn't have children. Deborah, the fourth judge of pre-monarchic Israel, is probably my favorite. She's a warrior, a counselor, our own Joan of Arc; she was married, but there's no mention of children.

In a 15th century commentary, *Akedat Yitzhak*, I also found a retort to Rachel's unhappiness about being barren. "Look at Proverbs 31," the commentator advises, "for intellectual and moral expressions of women's worth, and for the true purpose of humankind's existence."

Of all that I read, though, Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, spoke to me most deeply. "Procreation," he wrote, in relation to Genesis 1:28, "is revealed to us as a holy obligation; not some blind biological instinct, but rather an inner Divine goodness to be found in all aspects of life."

Yes, I thought. In all aspects of life. In my own, I have sought to nurture the human race. I have fought hard on behalf of peace for our people and on behalf of freedom for all women. I believe that I am doing, and have always done, holy work.

And I am following Judaism's first commandment. ■

Diane Balser teaches Women's Studies at Boston University. Active in the women's movement since the 1960s, she's a proponent of women's rights among Jews and an activist in the Jewish peace movement for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.